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Out of My Mind

Scientific Cranks

How to Recognize One and What to Do Until the Doctor Arrives

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

I have a very clear, almost affectionate, memory of my first encounter with a crank. It took place in the spring of 1958. I was at the time a visiting member, in physics, of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and had acquired a local reputation for my somewhat unorthodox working habits. Each morning I would arrive at the institute about 8:30 A.M., and leave about 5:30 P.M., just in time to greet many of my more conventional colleagues who would be coming into the institute for their normal night's work. There was, I recall, a young French mathematician, of considerable distinction, who was experimenting with a twenty-three hour day, and from time to time our work cycles would overlap—otherwise, except for the seminars, I was able to work through the daylight hours largely undisturbed.

In any event, one spring morning, about 9:00 A.M., as I was finishing the *New York Times* in my office, the hall telephone rang. (It was one of the late J. Robert Oppenheimer's conceits that the junior members should not have telephones in their offices lest their concentration be broken—with the consequence that there was one hall telephone for the entire floor, which, needless to say, disturbed *everyone* on the floor each time it rang.) It was Oppenheimer's secretary, informing me that I had a visitor from what sounded like a boiler factory in a nearby New Jersey community. I assured her that it was a simple case of misidentification, and was about to hang up when she said, with some insistence, "No, this is someone who wants to see *you*."

When I arrived in the large sitting room—used then for the afternoon teas—I was greeted by Oppenheimer's secretary, who presented to me, with no further explanation, a gentleman in his fifties, I would guess, dressed in blue jeans and a heavy jacket. His appearance was unremarkable except for his eyes, each of which appeared to function without relation to the other. It is an effect I have seen in certain large African birds. (The British comic actor Marty Feldman can also do it.) The gentleman studied me out of his right eye while the left one roamed peaceably over the woods in back of the institute, into which, incidentally, the celebrated British physicist P. A. M. Dirac, also a member that year, could often be seen disappearing, in the late afternoons, with an ax. (He informed us that he was constructing a trail in the general direction of Trenton.)

After what seemed like an eternity, the man suddenly said, "What is the speed of magnetism?" The whole atmosphere had come to resemble that of my Ph.D. oral examination, and for a moment I entertained the paranoid delusion that it was a device Oppenheimer had decided to employ to sort out the wheat from the chaff among us. I explained to the man that if he was referring to electromagnetic waves in free space, these propagated with the speed of light. There was more silence, and then he said, "It works by magnetism"—a statement that resisted comment on my part since I did not have the foggiest idea to what "it" referred. More silence, and then he asked, "Have you ever seen a flying

JEREMY BERNSTEIN is a professor of physics at Stevens Institute of Technology and a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. His latest book is *Einstein*.

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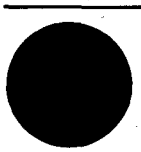

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saucer?" this time focusing on me with both eyes. I had to admit that unfortunately I had not. He explained to me that one had landed near his house just outside Trenton—which, if true, was the most interesting thing that I had heard about that community during my tenure in Princeton—and he was convinced that it had done it by magnetism. Before the conversation could get much further, Oppenheimer's secretary reappeared and told the man that Dr. Bernstein had a very important seminar to attend and would have to be excused. Later she explained to me that it was the policy at the institute to give all such visitors some sort of hearing in order to defuse possible trouble, and since it was known that I arrived in my office at an ungodly hour of the morning, I had drawn the duty. It never happened again during the two years I spent in Princeton.

In the subsequent years I went about my business in physics without encountering much more than a tiny trickle of cranks; that is, until I began to write about science for the general public and, above all, after I had written a popular article about Einstein and the theory of relativity for *The New Yorker*. The trickle has now become a sort of Niagara—an Amazon River—of cranks. They come by postcard, registered letter, and telephone. They arrive at almost every hour of the day or evening, and they do not take no for an answer. Let me give two rather recent examples.

One evening, about a year ago, the phone rang in my apartment. It was a long-distance call from somewhere in the Southwest, and it was from a gentleman whom I will refer to as A. (There is a B who will soon get into the act.) A began the conversation after verifying that I was the author of a certain book about the theory of elementary particles. He proclaimed that, in his opinion, this book was one of the greatest contributions to modern thought since Newton's *Principia*. *My* thought was, "What does *this* one want?" It soon became clear what he wanted. He had written, he informed me, a massive, as yet unpublished treatise in which was solved each and every problem that remained unsolved by my book (a hallmark of crank manuscripts is that they solve *everything*), and that furthermore, and for good measure, it contained a theory of the origin of the moon. (I thought of saying "Your beloved homeland?" but a second hallmark of cranks is that they are humorless.) Needless to say, he wanted me to read this document and to send him a commentary. Such a request might seem to be innocent enough, but a good deal of experience has taught me that it isn't. In the first place, no crank wants, or will accept, an honest criticism of anything. He has solved the "problem," whatever it is, and is looking for an endorsement. Even agreeing to accept, let alone comment on, such a manuscript opens one up to endless trouble. A number of letters from cranks contain lists of people, often distinguished people, who have agreed to look at the work, and I can visualize these unfortunates drowning in a stream of increasingly abusive correspondence from the crank authors, who will now claim that they have been misunderstood or that their ideas have been stolen by the very people to whom they had sent the manuscripts to read. (A third hallmark of the crank is that he is sure everyone is out to steal his ideas.)

I told the gentleman, politely but firmly, that I did not have the time to read his manuscript (the late Wolfgang Pauli used to tell such people that he had very weak eyes and his doctor had forbidden him to read much), and that if he sent it I would have to return it to him unopened. This, I thought, was the end of A. But no! Some six months later, when I was on sabbatical leave at another institution, I received a phone call *there*, again from the same southwestern city but this time from B. He informed me that his friend A had read my book and regarded it as the greatest contribution to human thought since . . . et cetera. He also told me that A's theory of the formation of the moon would soon hit the press, where it would make front-page news. (A fourth hallmark of the crank is that he is determined to bring the newspapers in somehow. A recent letter from one who "refuted" Einstein's theory of relativity ended by noting that if an immediate reply was not forthcoming he would turn the whole matter over to the press.) Again, I said to B that under no circumstances would I read A's book, and goodbye. But that did not end the matter. Only a few weeks ago I received a letter from A informing me that reading his book should

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be comparatively simple for me, since it "includes about 25% drawings and plates." I am expecting that at any moment the phone will ring and it will be C.

I will give one last example, since it is a nice illustration of what I might call the collaborative crank. Again the phone rang. This time I was at home in the morning, preparing a classroom lecture. A gentleman at the other end began by verifying that I was the one who had written about Einstein. I should have said no, but you can never tell, it might have been someone who wanted to buy the film rights. He told me that he had solved the "unified field problem," but since he had never studied physics he was looking for a collaborator—in order, I imagined, to dot a few *i*'s. Would I be interested in collaborating with him, and, if not, could I suggest anyone? One is tempted to give the name of a colleague under such circumstances, but this is a no-win strategy since your colleagues will turn their cranks over to you. It soon became clear that this man was determined to carry out the collaboration then and there, over the phone, unless I could think of something. In desperation, I asked him what his field of work was. It turned out that he was a financial adviser. I then asked him how he would feel if someone called him up at home in midmorning, when he was busy trying to give financial advice, and asked him to drop everything in order to begin an immediate collaboration on a physics problem. He pointed out that this case was different: if I really was sincere about my work, I *would* drop everything and listen to him since he had solved THE PROBLEM. (A fifth hallmark of cranks is that they use a lot of capital letters.) I told him that I was not sincere enough and hung up. Nothing more has been heard from him, but it is still early.

These are fairly typical examples, but they do raise an interesting question: Is there a chance that one of these people *has* solved something and that, by not giving him a full hearing, one really may have missed an opportunity? I sometimes have the following fantasy. It is the year 1905 and I am a professor of physics at the University of Berne. The phone rings, and a person I have never heard of identifies himself as a patent examiner in the Swiss National Patent Office. He says that he has heard I give lectures on electromagnetic theory and that he has developed some ideas which might interest me. "What sort of ideas?" I ask a bit superciliously. He begins discussing some crazy-sounding notions about space and time. Rulers contract when they are set in motion; a clock on the equator goes at a slower rate than the identical clock when it is placed at the North Pole; the mass of an electron increases with its velocity; whether or not two events are simultaneous depends on the frame of reference of the observer; and so on. How would I have reacted? Well, a great many of Albert Einstein's contemporaries would have hung up the phone. After all, in 1905, Einstein didn't even have an academic job!

Suppose I had had the good sense to ask the fellow for a reprint of his recently published paper "*Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körpern*" ("The Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies"). How could I have told that this was not a crank paper with a crank theory? There are, I think, at least two clues. In the first place, the theory—the special theory of relativity in this instance—satisfies what Niels Bohr later called, in a more general context, the correspondence principle. The relativity theory generalizes Newtonian mechanics, but, after all, Newton's mechanics works marvelously well for a vast domain of phenomena. Hence there must be some limit in which the two theories merge—or "correspond." A glance at Einstein's 1905 paper would show that in this case the limit is when the speed of light is effectively infinite compared to the usual velocities one encounters in most applications. Hence the two theories give essentially the same answers in their common domain of application—for small velocities. Crank theories, when they are theories at all—an important point to which I will return—usually start and end in midair. They do not connect in any way with things that are known. A really novel genuine theory may appear, at first sight, to be quite crazy, but they all have, if they are any good, this aspect of connectivity. In that sense a novel theory—like relativity—already comes with a large endowment of verification: the same experiments that verified its ancestors also serve to verify it.

The second clue I have alluded to above: it

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is that, in the phrase of the aforementioned Pauli, crank theories "aren't even wrong." I have never yet seen a crank physics theory that offered a novel quantitative prediction that could be either verified or falsified. It is usually awash in a garble of verbiage with terms like "energy," "field," "particle," "mass," and God knows what, all festooned like Christmas tree decorations. If there are any formulas in such theories, they are usually the formulas of well-known theories that the crank is bent on disproving. Einstein's 1905 paper may at first sight appear bizarre, but it is full of predictions. The whole thing is crying out to be tested in laboratories.

In this respect, it is interesting that the first novel prediction of the theory of relativity to have been tested—namely, the variation of mass with velocity—was *in disagreement* with the experiment. Einstein waited, unperturbed, for several years until it was shown that the original experiments were wrong; there was a leak in the vacuum system. In some sense the theory *had* to be right—such is its inner coherence. In the same sense, about the most exciting event that I can imagine happening in physics would be for an experimenter to find a breakdown in the relativity theory. The really interesting thing to find out is which, if any, of Einstein's assumptions will turn out to have a limited range of validity. In this enterprise we do not need the services of cranks.

There is, by the way, a certain set of quasi-crank theories that deserve special mention, since sometimes they turn out to be not so crankish after all. There are people who manage to come up with simple numerical formulas, usually of obscure origin, that *do* fit data. A few years ago, for example, a mathematician came up with a complicated but remarkable formula for the so-called "fine structure constant": the numerical parameter that measures the strength of the electromagnetic interaction with electrically charged matter. Its origins were—and, I still think, are—rather obscure, and he himself was quite modest about the whole thing; but there it was. Perhaps it was a numerical coincidence, or maybe it will turn out to have some deep significance that no one yet understands. About all one can do when confronted with such formulas is to put them in one's desk drawer and see what happens; at least, that's all I can do.

All of this having been said, there is a danger in dismissing some of this crank correspondence too lightly. It is not unusual to receive letters that look very weird but, if one takes the trouble to read them, turn out to be sincere requests for information. It is one thing for someone to send you a design for a perpetual motion machine, which is certain to turn out to be wrong, but it is another thing for someone to ask how, in principle, one can be certain that there is no such thing as a perpetual motion machine. What are the limits of validity to the currently accepted laws of thermodynamics? None, as far as we know, but it is a question that deserves a decent answer. I have engaged in some very pleasant correspondence with people who want to know the answers to questions like that, and replying to them is a good exercise in scientific self-expression.

Whatever else cranks may be up to, after one deals with several it becomes clear that they are not really interested in doing science. They are not prepared to accept the rough-and-tumble of scientific criticism; any criticism is regarded as a provocation and a threat. Cranks are looking for a psychological anchor—something that might be provided by a psychiatrist but is not likely to be provided by a theoretical physicist. In general, they do not seem to be dangerous—although, in one case that I know of, one of these people materialized in the offices of the American Physical Society some years ago and shot, and killed, a secretary because his ideas had been ignored. Since these people have started inflicting themselves on me in substantial numbers, I have made inquiries among doctors of various persuasions as to what the best tactics are for dealing with them. Their main piece of advice is to detach yourself from the situation as quickly as possible. Do not get involved with such people on the grounds that it may be "amusing" or that you can help them out. A formula that I find works in most cases is to write a note saying that while the person's ideas seem interesting, they are outside your field of expertise—whatever *that* is—and so you are unable to comment on them. This works in most cases.

There is one case, and I shall conclude with

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it, in which the best thing to do is to do nothing; that is the case of the abusive crank. Some years ago, after each and every article that I wrote for *The New Yorker*, on whatever subject, I received an incredibly abusive letter from an individual in New York. The main point of his communication was that I was a fraud and that I was causing him to waste his money by buying the magazine. When I got the first of these letters I had just started to write for *The New Yorker* and, having little or no experience in dealing with such things, I asked some of the veterans at the magazine what to do. They said to ignore it and forget it. In his subsequent letters, the individual, in addition to berating me for being a fraud, also let me have it for not answering his previous letters. It became almost like those classical Jewish jokes involving the definition of *chutzpa*. Finally I got an idea that I proposed to one of the senior editors at the magazine. I thought that we should have an elegant-looking card printed, with the Rea Irvin *New Yorker* logo, which would contain a single sentence, printed in *New Yorker* type. It would read: "At a recent meeting of the board of editors of *The New Yorker* it has been decided to cancel your subscription." Unfortunately the editors seemed to think that *this* was a crank idea.

Nothing at All

(For Roman Jakobson)

I. A. Richards

Nothing at all can I guess,
For all I do,
Of what in me says, YES,
Letting What's On go through,
Or else says, NO.

Within my inmost mind
It runs the Show,
Leaving me resigned
Nothing at all to know;
Yet it writes this too:
This Who-cares-What
Which rules me so,
Lets me or not.
And is the You
It's speaking to.

I. A. RICHARDS, the distinguished poet and critic, is the author of *Complementarities*, a collection of previously unpublished work written between 1919 and 1974.

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Greetings and Salutations

ARISTIDES

It is not, I recognize, a social problem of the order of seriousness of public housing or drug addiction, but to me, because I am more than a trifle literal-minded, it has long seemed vexing. How to begin a letter and how to end one, how to open a conversation and how to close one—simple enough matters of manners, one might have thought—have come to be a cause for consternation. "Manners are morals in bloom," reports a nineteenth-century authority on etiquette. My own garden, alas, is looking rather sickly.

My problem is not altogether a formal one, although, reading up on the subject, I find my formal ignorance is considerable. On the item of letter writing I recently discovered how considerable it is by consulting that treasure house of information on the subject, Emily Post's *Etiquette*, in the 1965 edition revised by Mrs. Post's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth L. Post. I like the Mesdames Post, sometimes for the unconscious humor to be found in their pages, but also because they are women of strong and clear character who have, as John Sparrow once put it in another context, the courage of their conventions.

A dip into *Etiquette* never, for me, fails to provide a fresh discovery. On my last such immersion, for example, I learned that my wife is not allowed to use my crest on her letter paper, for, say the Posts, "the crest is the exclusive property of male members of a family." (As for my crest, it is composed of two unmatched standard typewriters couchant upon a field of white strewn with typographical errors. It still awaits certification by the Heralds' College.) "Surprisingly few Americans," write the Posts, whose capacity for astonishment far exceeds my own, "seem to be aware of this heraldic rule."

Sisyphean are the labors of those who would codify manners at any time, but the stone is especially slippery in our own time. Manners have been properly defined as the overt forms of social intercourse that, when conventionalized, ease personal relationships. But the problem nowadays is that they rarely seem to be allowed time to become conventional. New wine in new bottles is the American way. Often this has comic results. If I read them aright, the Mrs. Posts maintain it to be good form for a divorced woman, in her correspondence, to retain her married name and append to it her maiden name. Thus the former Mary Johnson, having married and divorced Robert Simpson—with impeccable manners, the Posts refuse to go into the reasons for the divorce—would be correctly addressed as Mrs. Simpson Johnson. My edition of the Posts' *Etiquette* was brought out in 1965, or before the rise of the new feminism. What if the former Mary Johnson were an ardent feminist (which might, by the way, throw some light on the divorce)? If she were, like as not she would insist that her married name be, as the Irish say, parted in the middle by a hyphen, making her Mary Johnson-Simpson. After she left poor Simpson, would it be *de rigueur* to address future correspondence to her as Mrs. Johnson-Simpson Johnson? You see the quandary.

In other questions of etiquette, the arrangements of the new feminism seem to have caused as many problems as they have solved. Take the neologism *Ms.*, which, whatever the political impetus behind it, might have been supposed at least to have solved the technical problem of addressing letters to women whose marital status was uncertain. Whether one likes *Ms.* or not—and Graham Greene, among others, has registered public distaste for it on the grounds that it is unpro-

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nounceable—it does promise a certain efficiency. Courtesy here would seem to call for addressing people as they wish to be addressed; if women wish to be addressed as Ms., Negroes as blacks, West Coast Spanish-Americans as chicanos, this is fair and easily enough accommodated. But many women, it turns out, despise being addressed as Ms.; some are pleased to have it known they are single, others proud of being married. The novelist Jean Stafford has remarked that to her the letters MS will everlastingly stand for manuscript or multiple sclerosis. When letters addressed to *Ms.* Jean Stafford arrive, she immediately returns them unread, first opening them—a nice practical touch—to see if they contain a check.

Other advents of decorum owing to feminism make for further social touchiness. The use of the suffix "person," as in "chairperson," appears to rile fully as many people as it delights. Much depends, of course, on whose mouth the new phrases come out of. I have by experience been made a bit wary of men who too exuberantly rush into this practice. My first encounter with the greeting "Dear Gentlepersons" was not a happy one. No gentle person himself, its user followed up his letter with a telephone call to a female coworker of mine in which he proved so bullying as to bring her near to tears. When he asked to speak with me, he said, "Mr. Aristides, may I ask you a question? Are you a person who is flexible and open to innovation, or closed-minded and rigid?" I replied, "Closed-minded and rigid," which put *paid* to that conversation. But ever since, I have warned women to beware letters addressed to them as "Dear Gentleperson." They may come from a rapist.

Another problem has nothing to do with feminism but with what I think of as the regulation of intimacy in a correspondence. This cuts two ways: how to keep at bay those with whom one does not wish to extend the line of informality, and how to gain greater intimacy with those one wishes to know better. I speak of the great first-name problem. Autobiographical experience here, too, has not always been felicitous. In Chicago, the city of my birth and upbringing, policemen, or at least some of them, after stopping one for a traffic violation and requesting one's driver's license, were fond of beginning, "Well, I guess you know you were speeding, Nikolai." Such enforced (and one-way) intimacy was generally a signal for a bribe. Salesmen, too—usually those whose pressure sends the mercury flying up toward the top of the thermometer—are often quick with first names.

"I think we have exactly the car you want, sir. Now, if you will take a seat here, we'll first run over the figures. Can I have your name, sir?"

"Aristides."

"First name, sir."

"The initial is N."

"Can I have the full name, sir, for our records?"

"Nikolai."

"Great. Well, now, did you want the factory air and the radial tires on this baby, Nik?"

In correspondence, being wary of growing too quickly intimate with those I have never met, I find myself almost as wary of those who wish quickly to become intimate with me. Either a natural diffidence or an unnatural stiffness causes me to be put off by letters or telephone calls from persons I have never been in touch with before who come on with my first name. Men and women of the media, who apparently feel themselves right at home everywhere, seem to have the habit of instant intimacy. On the infrequent occasions when I am invited by phone to appear on a radio or television talk show and a stranger calls me by my first name, I generally ask as quickly as possible what he will pay me to appear on the show. When he says—as they invariably do—that budget does not allow payments to guests, I then ask if he would consider giving me a portion of his salary, since by appearing on the show I would be helping him earn it. "What, incidentally," I will ask, if in a sufficiently mischievous mood, "do you earn per week?" If you wish to be intimate, this question is calculated to imply, then let's *really* get intimate. Oddly enough, it immediately lends a cold air of formality to further conversation.

True intimacy is not only a many-splendored, but a subtle, thing—and progressing toward it in a correspondence can be a matter of great delicacy. Sometimes one's wish for greater intimacy is simply out of

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one's control to act upon. If one's correspondent is much older, or by general recognition more distinguished, or (in what is sometimes necessarily a political context) more powerful, then the lead toward intimacy is his rather than one's own. (Not for me to have addressed a letter to the late T. S. Eliot "Dear Tom," yet how pleasing it would have been to have had him address one to me as "Dear Nikolai"!) But in a correspondence between two persons who are, roughly speaking, equals, things can grow trickier. The tone of the letters generally gives the clue, although sometimes the duration of the correspondence can make reverting to first names permissible.

Among intellectuals and academics, frequently there is a gradation in the steps from surnames to first names in which both names are pressed into service: thus, "Dear Nikolai Aristides"; or, in the same gradation, making use of the diminutive first name: "Dear Nik Aristides." Many people are put off by this use of both one's names, and I am among them, although I cannot say exactly why. Perhaps it smacks too much of memories of grade-school scoldings: "Nikolai Aristides, you march down to the principal's office this moment!" It is also too betwixt-and-between, an odious and/or—neither formal nor intimate but rather like wearing a dinner jacket with tennis shoes.

The best solution I have seen to this problem was that adopted by an Englishman whom I have known only through letters, but whom I have come to think of as a friend. When our correspondence began, we shared mutual acquaintances and common interests. As the correspondence picked up, it became clear that our senses of humor were similar as well. The initial reason for our exchange of letters was business, and the first three or four of his letters, along with being about business, ended on a light and witty note. He began what was perhaps the fifth in our exchange of letters with the following opening: "Dear Mr. Aristides, I do wish that, as Henry James once wrote under comparable circumstances, I could 'take a flying leap at the barrier of formality' and use your first name." That may be too literary for some tastes, but not for mine. More than two years later, I still marvel at the immense courtesy of that beginning. A delightful step in a dance to the music of friendship, it provided a lead wonderfully easy to follow. "Dear John," I was easily able to reply in my next letter to him, "There now, Henry James's barrier of formality is leapt." Manners so elegant go far beyond etiquette to become what manners at their best always are—the kindliest consideration for others.

Ever a fount of new knowledge, Emily and Elizabeth Post inform me that the opening "My dear Miss X" is more formal than "Dear Miss X," cascading down, in degrees of informality and toward greater intimacy, to "Dear Sally," "Sally dear," "Dearest Sally," "Sally darling," and ending doubtless in outright obscenities of intimacy. Yet European men, I note, often address letters to another man with "My dear," followed by one's last name alone: "My dear Aristides." Perhaps it is another instance of America slavishly following Europe, but I find something dashing and manly in such an opening. It has about it the hurried quality of the man of affairs shooting off a quick communication from (say) the Finland Station, or exile, or the battlefront.

In my own correspondence, because I am a sometime university teacher, I find myself often misaddressed as Dr. Aristides—misaddressed because I have no doctorate and am thus undeserving of the academicizing prefix. Explaining this is usually too complicated, so I let it ride. Among academics, scientists seem, in my experience, to go in for this doctoring more than do those in the social sciences or the humanities. The initials Ph.D. after one's signature continue to be put to use by many men and woman at smaller or backwater colleges and universities; possibly for this reason, "Dr." has come to seem rather bush league. Whenever the voice at the other end of the telephone—often a student but sometimes a nonacademic—begins by asking, "Is this Dr. Aristides?" I find myself having to fight back the temptation to respond, "It is. My advice is read two chapters of Flaubert and get right into bed."

But I should prefer, any day, to be misaddressed as "Dr." than in what I have come to think of as the style of the contemptuous familiar. Possibly deriving from the old cockney use of "Guvnor," behind which I am not sure there was any malice, in the United

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States the contemptuous familiar variants have tended to take a nastier turn. Once in greater use than now by cabdrivers, bus drivers, bartenders, and roughhouse clerks, the main terms of the contemptuous familiar used to be Mac, Ace, Chief, Buddy, Skipper, Speedy, and Tiger. ("Where to, Mac?" "What's yours, Ace?" "More coffee, Chief?") The equivalent terms for women in the contemptuous familiar were Sister, Sweetheart, Baby, and Doll. For reasons I do not quite understand, the contemptuous familiar seems to be passing from the scene, leaving merely free-floating contempt in its wake.

As a form of greeting, handshaking as well has undergone change. Thirty years ago and more, a firm handshake, at least between men, was considered a mark of masculinity and even something of a key to male character; or so, at any rate, young boys were instructed by their fathers. ("Don't give a man a dead fish, son. Squeeze a man's hand.") No longer, I suspect. Two, and possibly more, new styles of handshake have come into vogue. The first, on display regularly in televised sports events, is the slap downward on the palm-upward hand. ("Can I get it, Baby?" Slap. "You got it.") This has a certain utility when, for example, a baseball player crosses the plate after a homer and is greeted there by several teammates. The other new handshake is a more Roman affair. Instead of hands being extended and meeting out away from the body, they are joined more vertically, as if in the beginning position for hand wrestling. The first time I had this new handshake used on me, I extended my hand for my traditional square handshake, whereupon my arm was jerked upward, my fingers locked in a tight grasp, and I barely averted going down for the count.

The Posts offer advice aplenty, along with models, on the kinds of letters to write in response to specific occasions, but I am afraid that I am inaccessible to their sensible advice. The reason is that some years ago I read a little parody on the subject of model letters entitled "How Shall I Word It?" by Max Beerbohm, which has made such advice forever laughable to me, as it would to anyone who came across it. Here is Max Beerbohm's model letter in acknowledgment of a wedding present:

Dear Lady Amblesham,

Who gives quickly, says the old proverb, gives twice. For this reason I have purposely delayed writing to you, lest I should appear to thank you more than once for the small, cheap, hideous present you sent me on the occasion of my recent wedding. Were you a poor woman, that little bowl of ill-imitated Dresden china would convict you of tastelessness merely; were you a blind woman, of nothing but an odious parsimony. As you have normal eyesight and more than normal wealth, your gift to me proclaims you at once a Philistine and a miser (or rather did so proclaim you until, less than ten seconds after I had unpacked it from its wrappings of tissue paper, I took it to the open window and had the satisfaction of seeing it shattered to atoms on the pavement). But stay! I perceive a possible flaw in my argument. Perhaps you were guided in your choice by a definite wish to insult me. I am sure, on reflection, that this was so. *I shall not forget.*

Yours, etc.,
Cynthia Beaumarsh

PS. My husband asks me to tell you to warn Lord Amblesham to keep out of his way or to assume some disguise so complete that he will not be recognized by him and horsewhipped.

PPS. I am sending copies of this letter to the principal London and provincial newspapers.

Which brings me to what, in the letter-writing manuals, is charmingly called the "complimentary close." Once the closing of a letter was itself an act of delicate art, comparable to the coda of a symphonic work. To find a transition that smoothly linked the body of a letter to its close was a problem every gracious letter writer had to confront: ". . . your many kindnesses to me, who remains, and shall everlastingly, your most humble and obedient servant. Yours &c. . . ." Today we are left to sign off with a single word or phrase that is supposed to embody the sentiments of all that has gone before, be it "Sincerely" or "Truly" or "Cordially" or "Faithfully" or sending along "Best wishes." But what about those literal-minded letter writers among us who feel that neither sincerity nor truthfulness nor cordiality nor faithfulness well describes us? Sometimes I, for one, feel "Affectionately" toward those to whom I write, but not by a long shot to every-

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one. I could, I suppose, sign myself "As ever" but for the fact that I am so changeable in my moods. To sign myself "Tentatively" will not do, and I frankly wish to reserve my "Best wishes" for my immediate family. The position of people like me is akin to that of Mr. Llewellyn Hutchinson, who, after many years of not being able to get a letter printed in *The Times* (London)—"the duty of the distinguished," as one correspondent put it, ". . . ever the ambition of the obscure"—wrote to that august journal on January 11, 1930:

> Sir,
>
> Like your correspondent "Victorian," I do not address you as "Dear Sir," because you are not dear to me, unless you print my letter. But I decline to accept "Victorian's" dictum that I must sign myself "always" (or even for a moment) "your obedient servant." I cannot tell a lie, with any chance of success, and I am *not* your obedient servant. I do not believe that "Victorian" would remain your obedient servant if you told him not to write to you any more. "Yours, &c." is horrible; "yours sincerely" is insincere; "yours truly" is untrue. "Yours faithfully" seems to hit the mark. We obscure persons who write to you are full of Faith: so full, in fact, that there is no room for Hope.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> Llewellyn Hutchinson

H. L. Mencken, painted into a corner by his own brash iconoclasm, had a similar problem. Not for him the easy use of "Sincerely," "Truly," or "Cordially." As a famous agnostic, he would frequently end his letters by offering to pray for his correspondent. To letters violently attacking his writings, he would rejoin, on a preprinted postcard, "Dear Sir or Madame: You may or may not be right." In some of his letters, in a single-phrase criticism of the entire project of closing a letter, he would sign off, "All the usual hypocrisies."

Of course, social intercourse has need of little hypocrisies, the more usual the better, to lubricate and thus smooth the way to more important things. Best to look upon them as stage instructions, ways of getting one's own character on and off the stage. One's entrances and exits are not, after all, as significant as what is said on the stage itself. Yet too discordant a note coming onstage can foul the main dialogue, and too false a note upon exiting can have a similar result. In conversation, either in person or over the telephone, "Hello" and "Good-bye" might be thought sufficient, but most of us seek, in our greetings and farewells, a trademark expressive of what we deem to be special about our personalities. Possibly this is modeled on show-business figures and radio and television broadcasters, most of whom have devised their own particular ways of signing off.

"Take care," "Take it easy," "Take it easy—but do take it," "Be good," "Peace," "Shalom," "*Ciao*," and, more recently, "Take it light" (as opposed, one gathers, to taking it heavy)—these are among the standard conversational closes of our day. Sometimes a regional twist will be added. In the South, upon departing a shop or someone's home, it is not uncommon to be sent off with, "Hurry on back now, y'hear?" Generally, this causes me to wish I could go out the door, then come right back in, set down my carpetbag, and announce, "Well, as per your instructions, here I am again."

Still another fairly new salute upon departure has arisen: "Have a good day." I once thought that this was indigenous to the Middle West, but of late I have heard it said with fair frequency on both coasts. "Have a good day" is apparently another of those expressions that have the power of getting under people's skin. Some deplore it with sufficient fervor to allow its utterance to ruin their day altogether. Years ago, when someone would say "Nice day" to Henry Luce, not the most easygoing of men, he would, according to his biographer W. A. Swanberg, shoot back, "Why do you say that?" Why do so many people now say "Have a good day"? It fills the gap at the end of conversation or business dealings; it offers a gentle way offstage; it provides a harmless mode of well-wishing; it has a pleasant rhythm.

Yet "Have a good day" raises certain questions. Why merely a good day? Why not a good week? Or month? Or indeed fiscal year? I myself could use a good decade. A witty television sports broadcaster named Ray Gandoff used to end his broadcasts by saying, "Have a good life," which is perhaps getting too much into the spirit of the thing. What is decisive, and easily enough judged, is the feeling behind "Have a good day." Over the radio a woman who has just learned that she

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has lost $10,000 dollars for not answering her phone by saying "WMAQ is going to make me rich," says: "Oh, my God! How terrible!" "Too bad," the disc jockey informs her, "but maybe we'll call again. Meanwhile, have a good day." Fat chance.

Does any of this matter? In *The People, Yes* Carl Sandburg wrote:

> The people is Everyman, everybody.
> Everybody is you and me and all the others.
> What everybody says is what we all say.
> And what is it we all say?

We all say pretty much the same thing, doubtless. And yet each of us likes to distinguish himself—if not by his deeds, at least by his language. Some of us go in for precision, others for rhythm, still others for whatever is the going thing. Those of us who claim to care about language have a debt, an obligation to look for those forms of expression that have become petrified, those phrases that have become deadened, those mannerisms that have become hollow. I, at any rate, believe this an important task, and I believe it sincerely, truly, faithfully, respectfully, cordially, and affectionately. If you do not believe that it matters at all—well, what I wish to say to you is, "Have a good day."

A Sky Filled With Trees

Louis Daniel Brodsky

Even if a hundred Ho Tais
  Drooping like plump Buddhas
From pear trees planted in the sky
  Fell from the ivory heavens
And landed in my open eyes
  Like Orient moon fruit,

I doubt if I would realize
  That they were tokens of fortune
Meant to keep me alive,
  Not as food to be eaten;
Just by being reminders
  That the mind can harvest the sky.

LOUIS DANIEL BRODSKY has five published books of poems and is currently working on two more: *La Preciosa* and *Stranded in the Land of Transients.*

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The Little Man at Chehaw Station

The American Artist and His Audience

RALPH ELLISON

IT WAS AT TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE during the mid-1930s that I was made aware of the little man behind the stove. At the time I was a trumpeter majoring in music and had aspirations of becoming a classical composer. As such, shortly before the little man came to my attention, I had outraged the faculty members who judged my monthly student's recital by substituting a certain skill of lips and fingers for the intelligent and artistic structuring of emotion that was demanded in performing the music assigned to me. Afterward, still dressed in my hired tuxedo, my ears burning from the harsh negatives of their criticism, I had sought solace in the basement studio of Hazel Harrison, a highly respected concert pianist and teacher. Miss Harrison had been one of Ferruccio Busoni's prize pupils, had lived (until the rise of Hitler had driven her back to a U.S.A. that was not yet ready to recognize her talents) in Busoni's home in Berlin, and was a friend of such masters as Egon Petri, Percy Grainger, and Sergei Prokofiev. It was not the first time that I had appealed to Miss Harrison's generosity of spirit, but today her reaction to my rather adolescent complaint was less than sympathetic.

"But, baby," she said, "in this country you must always prepare yourself to play your very best wherever you are, and on all occasions."

"But everybody tells you that," I said.

"Yes," she said, "but there's more to it than you're usually told. Of course you've always been taught to *do* your best, *look* your best, *be* your best. You've been told such things all your life. But now you're becoming a musician, an artist, and when it comes to performing the classics in this country, there's something more involved."

Watching me closely, she paused.

"Are you ready to listen?"

"Yes, ma'am."

RALPH ELLISON is the author of *Invisible Man*, which won the National Book Award, and of *Shadow and Act*, a collection of essays. He is Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at New York University.

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"All right," she said, "you must *always* play your best, even if it's only in the waiting room at Chehaw Station, because in this country there'll always be a little man hidden behind the stove."

"A *what*?"

She nodded. "That's right," she said. "There'll always be the little man whom you don't expect, and he'll know the *music*, and the *tradition*, and the standards of *musicianship* required for whatever you set out to perform!"

Speechless, I stared at her. After the working-over I'd just received from the faculty, I was in no mood for joking. But no, Miss Harrison's face was quite serious. So what did she mean? Chehaw Station was a lonely whistle-stop where swift north- or southbound trains paused with haughty impatience to drop off or take on passengers; the point where, on homecoming weekends, special coaches crowded with festive visitors were cut loose, coupled to a waiting switch engine, and hauled to Tuskegee's railroad siding. I knew it well, and as I stood beside Miss Harrison's piano, visualizing the station, I told myself, *She has GOT to be kidding!*

For, in my view, the atmosphere of Chehaw's claustrophobic little waiting room was enough to discourage even a blind street musician from picking out blues on his guitar, no matter how tedious his wait for a train. Biased toward disaster by bruised feelings, my imagination pictured the vibrations set in motion by the winding of a trumpet within that drab, utilitarian structure: first shattering, then bringing its walls "a-tumbling down"—like Jericho's at the sounding of Joshua's priest-blown ram horns.

True, Tuskegee possessed a rich musical tradition, both classical and folk, and many music lovers and musicians lived or moved through its environs, but—and my regard for Miss Harrison notwithstanding—Chehaw Station was the last place in the area where I would expect to encounter a connoisseur lying in wait to pounce upon some rash, unsuspecting musician. Sure, a connoisseur might hear the haunting, blues-echoing, train-whistle rhapsodies blared by fast express trains as they thundered past—but the classics? Not a chance!

So as Miss Harrison watched to see the effect of her words, I said with a shrug, "Yes, ma'am."

She smiled, her prominent eyes a-twinkle.

"I hope so," she said. "But if you don't just now, you will by the time you become an artist. So remember the little man behind the stove."

With that, seating herself at her piano, she began thumbing through a sheaf of scores—a signal that our discussion was ended.

So, I thought, *you ask for sympathy and you get a riddle.* I would have felt better if she had said, "Sorry, baby, I know how you feel, but

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after all, I was *there*, I *heard* you; and you treated your audience as though you were some kind of confidence man with a horn. So forget it, because I will not violate my own standards by condoning sterile musicianship." Some such reply, by reaffirming the "sacred principles" of art to which we were both committed, would have done much to supply the emotional catharsis for which I was appealing. By refusing, she forced me to accept full responsibility and thus learn from my offense. The condition of artistic communication is, as the saying goes, hard but fair.

But although disappointed and puzzled by Miss Harrison's sibylline response, I respected her artistry and experience too highly to dismiss it. Besides, something about her warning of a cultivated taste that asserted its authority out of obscurity sounded faintly familiar. Hadn't I once worked for an eccentric millionaire who prowled the halls and ballrooms of his fine hotel looking like a derelict who had wandered in off the street? Yes! And woe unto the busboy or waiter, hallman or maid—or anyone else—caught debasing the standards of that old man's house. For then, lashing out with the abruptness of reality shattering the contrived facade of a practical joke, the apparent beggar revealed himself as an extremely irate, and exacting, host of taste.

Thus, as I leaned into the curve of Miss Harrison's Steinway and listened to an interpretation of a Liszt rhapsody (during which she carried on an enthusiastic, stylistic analysis of passages that Busoni himself had marked for expressional subtlety), the little man of Chehaw Station fixed himself in my memory. And so vividly that today he not only continues to engage my mind, but often materializes when I least expect him.

As, for instance, when I'm brooding over some problem of literary criticism—like, say, the rhetoric of American fiction. Indeed, the little stove warmer has come to symbolize nothing less than the enigma of aesthetic communication in American democracy. I especially associate him with the metamorphic character of the general American audience, and with the unrecognized and unassimilated elements of its taste. For me he represents that unknown quality which renders the American audience far more than a receptive instrument that may be dominated through a skillful exercise of the sheerly "rhetorical" elements—the flash and filigree—of the artist's craft. While that audience is eager to be transported, astounded, thrilled, it counters the artist's manipulation of forms with an attitude of antagonistic cooperation; acting, for better or worse, as both collaborator and judge. Like a strange orchestra upon which a guest conductor would impose his artistic vision, it must be exhorted, persuaded—even wooed—as the price of its applause. It must be appealed to on the basis of what it assumes to be truth as a means of inducting it into new dimensions of artistic truth. By playing artfully

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upon the audience's sense of experience and form, the artist seeks to shape its emotions and perceptions to his vision; while it, in turn, simultaneously cooperates and resists, says yes and says no in an it-takes-two-to-tango binary response to his effort. As representative of the American audience writ small, the little man draws upon the uncodified *Americanness* of his experience—whether of life or of art—as he engages in a silent dialogue with the artist's exposition of forms, offering or rejecting the work of art on the basis of what he feels to be its affirmation or distortion of American experience.

Perhaps if they were fully aware of his incongruous existence, the little man's neighbors would reject him as a source of confusion, a threat to social order, and a reminder of the unfinished details of this powerful nation. But out of a stubborn individualism born of his democratic origins, he insists upon the cultural necessity of his role, and argues that if he didn't exist he would have to be invented. If he were not already manifest in the flesh, he would still exist and function as an idea and ideal because—like such character traits as individualism, restlessness, self-reliance, love of the new, and so on—he is a linguistic product of the American scene and language, and a manifestation of the idealistic action of the American Word as it goads its users toward a perfection of our revolutionary ideals.

For the artist, a lightning rod attracting unexpected insights and a warning against stale preconceptions, the man behind Chehaw's stove also serves as a metaphor for those individuals we sometimes meet whose refinement of sensibility is inadequately explained by family background, formal education, or social status. These individuals seem to have been sensitized by some obscure force that issues undetected from the chromatic scale of American social hierarchy: a force that throws off strange, ultrasonic ultrasemi-semitones that create within those attuned to its vibrations a mysterious enrichment of personality. In this, heredity doubtless plays an important role, but whatever that role may be, it would appear that, culturally and environmentally, such individuals are products of errant but sympathetic vibrations set up by the tension between America's social mobility, its universal education, and its relative freedom of cultural information. Characterized by a much broader "random accessibility" than class and economic restrictions would appear to allow, this cultural information includes many of the finest products of the arts and intellect—products that are so abundantly available in the form of books, graphics, recordings, and pictorial reproductions as to escape sustained attempts at critical evaluation. Just how these characteristics operate in concert involves the mysterious interaction between environment and personality, instinct and culture. But the frequency and wide dispersal of individuals who reveal the effects of

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this mysterious configuration of forces endows each American audience, whether of musician, poet, or plastic artist, with a special mystery of its own.

I say "mystery," but perhaps the phenomenon is simply a product of our neglect of serious cultural introspection, our failure to conceive of our fractured, vernacular-weighted culture as an intricate whole. And since there is no reliable sociology of the dispersal of ideas, styles, or tastes in this turbulent American society, it is possible that, personal origins aside, the cultural circumstances here described offer the intellectually adventurous individual what might be termed a broad "social mobility of intellect and taste"—plus an incalculable scale of possibilities for self-creation. While the force that seems to have sensitized those who share the little man of Chehaw Station's unaccountable knowingness—call it a climate of free-floating sensibility—appears to be a random effect generated by a society in which certain assertions of personality, formerly the prerogative of high social rank, have become the privilege of the anonymous and the lowly.

If this be true, the matter of the artist's ability to identify the mixed background and general character of his audience can be more problematical than might be assumed. In the field of literature it presents a problem of rhetoric, a question of how to fashion strategies of communication that will bridge the many divisions of background and taste which any representative American audience embodies. To the extent that American literature is both an art of discovery and an artistic agency for creating a consciousness of cultural identity, it is of such crucial importance as to demand of the artist not only an eclectic resourcefulness of skill, but an act of democratic faith. In this light, the American artist will do his best not only because of his dedication to his form, his craft, but because he realizes that, despite an inevitable unevenness of composition, the chances are that any American audience will conceal at least *one* individual whose knowledge and taste will complement, or surpass, his own. This (to paraphrase Miss Harrison) is because even the most homogeneous audiences are culturally mixed and embody, in their relative anonymity, the mystery of American cultural identity.

That identity—tentative, controversial, constantly changing—is confusing to artist and audience alike. To the audience because it is itself of mixed background, and seldom fully conscious of the cultural (or even political) implications of its own wide democratic range. To the artist, because in the broadest thrust of his effort he directs his finest effects to an abstract (and thus ideal) refinement of sensibility which, because it is not the exclusive property of a highly visible elite, is difficult to pinpoint. As one who operates within the historical frame of his given art, the artist may direct himself to those who are conscious of the most advanced state

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of his art: his artistic peers. But if his work has social impact, which is one gauge of its success as symbolic communication, it will reach into unpredictable areas. Many of us, by the way, read our first Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Mann in barbershops, heard our first opera on phonographs. Thus, the ideal level of sensibility to which the American artist would address himself tends to transcend the lines of class, religion, region, and race—floating, as it were, free in the crowd. There, like the memory registers of certain computer systems, it is simultaneously accessible at any point in American society. Such are the circumstances that render the little man at Chehaw Station not only possible but inevitable.

But who, then, *is* this little man of Miss Harrison's riddle? From behind what unlikely mask does he render his judgments? And by what magic of art can his most receptive attention, his grudging admiration, be excited? No idle questions these; like Shakespeare's Hamlet, the little man has his pride and complexity. He values his personal uniqueness, cherishes his privacy, and clings to that tricky democratic anonymity which makes locating him an unending challenge. Hamlet masked himself with madness; the little man plays mute. Drawn to the brightness of bright lights, he cloaks himself in invisibility—perhaps because in the shadow of his anonymity he can be both the vernacular cat who looks at (and listens to) the tradition-bound or fad-struck king *and* the little boy who sees clearly the artist-emperor's pretentious nakedness. Garcia Lorca writes of a singer who presented an audience of *cante hondo* lovers with a voice and restraint of passion better suited to a recital of *bel canto*. "Hurray," responded a deadpan Spanish cousin of the ghost of Chehaw Station, "for the school of Paris!"

Which is to say that, having been randomly exposed to diverse artistic conventions, the little man has learned to detect the true transcendent ambience created by successful art from chic shinola. "Form should fit function," says he, "and style theme. Just as punishment should fit crime—which it seldom does nowadays—or as a well-made shoe the foot." Something of an autodidact, he has his own hierarchal ranking of human values, both native American and universal. And along with these his own range of pieties—filial, sacred, racial—which constitute, in effect, the rhetorical "stops" through which his sensibilities are made responsive to artistic structurings of symbolic form.

Connoisseur, critic, trickster, the little man is also a day-coach, cabin-class traveler—but the timing of his arrivals and departures is uncertain. Sometimes he's there, sometimes he's here. Being quintessentially American, he enjoys the joke, the confounding of hierarchal expectations, fostered by his mask; that cultural incongruity through which he, like Brer Rabbit, is able to convert even the most decorous of

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audiences into his own briar patch and temper the chilliest of classics to his own vernacular taste. Hence as a practitioner of art, a form of symbolic communication that depends upon a calculated refinement of statement and affect, the American artist must also know the special qualities of that second instrument: his native audience; an audience upon which—arousing, frustrating, and fulfilling its expectations to the conventionalized contours of symbolic action—he is called upon to play as a pianist upon a piano. But here a special, most American problem arises. Thanks to the presence of the little man, this second instrument can be most unstable in its tuning, and downright ornery in its responses. In approaching it, the artist may, if he will, play fast and loose with modes and traditions, techniques and styles; but only at his peril does he treat an American audience as though it were as easily manipulated as a jukebox.

Reject the little man in the name of purity or as one who aspires beyond his social station or cultural capacity—fine! But it is worth remembering that one of the implicitly creative functions of art in the U.S.A. (and certainly of narrative art) is the defining and correlating of diverse American experiences by bringing previously unknown patterns, details, and emotions into view along with those that are generally recognized. Here one of the highest awards of art is the achievement of that electrifying and creative collaboration between the work of art and its audience that occurs when, through the unifying force of its vision and its power to give meaningful focus to apparently unrelated emotions and experiences, art becomes simultaneously definitive of specific and universal truths.

In this country, the artist is free to choose, but cannot limit, his audience. He may ignore the unknown or unplaced sector of the public, but the mystifications of snobbery are of no avail against the little man's art hunger. Having arrived at his interest in art through familiar but uncharted channels, he disdains its use either as a form of social climbing or of social exclusion. Democratically innocent of hierarchal striving, he takes his classics as he takes his tall tales or jazz—without frills. But while self-effacing, he is nevertheless given to a democratic touchiness, and is suspicious of all easy assumptions of superiority based upon appearances. When fretted by an obtuse artistic hand, he can be quite irritable, and what frets him utterly is any attitude that offends his quite human pieties by ignorance or disregard for his existence.

And yet the little man feels no urge to impose censorship upon the artist. Possessing an American-vernacular receptivity to change, a healthy delight in creative attempts at formalizing irreverence, and a Yankee trader's respect for the experimental, he is repelled by works of art that would strip human experience—especially American experi-

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ence—of its wonder and stubborn complexity. Not that he demands that his own shadowy image be dragged into each and every artistic effort; that would make a shambles of art's necessary illusion by violating the social reality in which he finds his being. It is enough that the artist (above all, the novelist, dramatist, poet) forge images of American experience that resonate symbolically with his own ubiquitous presence. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway tells us, by way of outlining his background's influence upon his moral judgments, that his family fortune was started by an Irish uncle who immigrated during the Civil War, paid a substitute to fight in his stead, and went on to become wealthy from war profiteering. Enough said! This takes hardly a paragraph, but the themes of history, wealth, immigration are struck like so many notes on a chime. Assuming his Afro-American identity, costume, and mask, the little man behind the stove would make the subtle symbolic connections among Gatsby's ill-fated social climbing, the wealthy wastrels whose manners and morals are the focus of the action, the tragic ironies echoing so faintly from the Civil War (that seedbed of so many northern fortunes), and his own social condition; among the principles of democracy that form the ground upon which the novel's drama of manners and social hierarchy is enacted, and the cost to Gatsby of confusing the promises of democracy with the terms governing their attainment. In so doing, the little underground-outsider would incorporate the inside-outsider Gatz-Gatsby's experience into his own, and his own into Gatsby's: a transposition that Gatsby would probably have abhorred but one that might have saved his life.

Or again, the little man, by imposing collaboratively his own vision of American experience upon that of the author, would extend the novel's truth to levels below the threshold of that frustrating and illusory social mobility which forms the core of Gatsby's anguish. Responding out of a knowledge of the manner in which the mystique of wealth is intertwined with the American mysteries of class and color, he would aid the author in achieving the more complex vision of American experience that was implicit in his material. As a citizen, the little man endures the social restrictions that limit his own social mobility with a certain grace, but *as a reader* he demands that the relationship between his own condition and that of those more highly placed be recognized. He senses that American experience is of a whole, and he wants the interconnections revealed. And not out of a penchant for protest, nor out of petulant vanity, but because he sees his own condition as an inseparable part of a larger truth in which the high and the lowly, the known and the unrecognized, the comic and the tragic are woven into the American skein. Having been attuned at Chehaw Station to the clangor of diverse bell sounds, he asks not for *whom* the bell tolls, only that it be struck

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artfully and with that fullness of resonance which warns all men of man's fate. At his best he does not ask for scapegoats, but for the hero as witness. How ironic it was that in the world of *The Great Gatsby* the witness who could have identified the driver of the death car that led to Gatsby's murder was a black man whose ability to communicate (and communication implies moral judgment) was of no more consequence to the action than that of an ox that might have observed Icarus's sad plunge into the sea. (This, by the way, is not intended as a criticism of Fitzgerald, only to suggest some of the problems and possibilities of artistic communication in the U.S.A.) In this light, the little man is a cautionary figure who challenges the artist to reach out for new heights of expressiveness. If we ignore his possible presence, violence might well be done to that ideal of cultivated democratic sensibility which was the goal of the likes of Emerson and Whitman, and for which the man at Chehaw Station is a metaphor. Respect his presence and even the most avant-garde art may become an agency for raising the general level of artistic taste. The work of art is, after all, an act of faith in our ability to communicate symbolically.

But why would Hazel Harrison associate her humble metaphor for the diffusion of democratic sensibility with a mere whistle-stop? Today I would guess that it was because Chehaw Station functioned as a point of arrival and departure for people representing a wide diversity of tastes and styles of living. Philanthropists, businessmen, sharecroppers, students, artistic types passed through its doors. But the same, in a more exalted fashion, is true of Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Museum; all three structures are meeting places for motley mixtures of people. So while it might require a Melvillean imagination to reduce American society to the dimensions of either concert hall or railroad station, their common feature as gathering places, as juncture points for random assemblies of sensibilities, reminds us again that in this particular country even the most homogeneous gatherings of people are mixed and pluralistic. Perhaps the mystery of American cultural identity contained in such motley mixtures arises out of our persistent attempts to reduce our cultural diversity to an easily recognizable unity.

On the other hand, Americans tend to focus on the diverse parts of their culture (with which they can more easily identify) rather than on its complex and pluralistic wholeness. But perhaps they identify with the parts because the whole is greater, if not of a different quality, than its parts. That difference, that new and problematic quality—call it our "Americanness"—creates out of its incongruity an uneasiness within us, because it is a constant reminder that American democracy is not only a political collectivity of individuals but, culturally, a collectivity of styles, tastes, and traditions.

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In this lies the source of many of our problems, especially those centering upon American identity. In relationship to the cultural whole we are, all of us—white or black, native born or immigrant—members of minority groups. Beset by feelings of isolation because of the fluid, pluralistic turbulence of the democratic process, we cling desperately to our own familiar fragment of the democratic rock, and from such fragments we confront our fellow Americans in that combat of civility, piety, and tradition which is the drama of American social hierarchy. Holding desperately to our familiar turf, we engage in that ceaseless contention whose uneasily accepted but unrejectable purpose is the projection of an ever more encompassing and acceptable definition of our corporate identity as Americans. Usually this contest (our improvised moral equivalent for armed warfare) proceeds as a war of words, a clash of styles—or as rites of symbolic sacrifice in which cabalistic code words are used to designate victims consumed with an Aztec voracity for scapegoats. Indeed, so frequently does this conflict erupt into physical violence that one sometimes wonders if there is any other viable possibility for coexisting in so abstract and futuristic a nation as this.

The rock, the terrain upon which we struggle is itself abstract, a terrain of ideas that, although man-made, exert the compelling force of the ideal, of the sublime; ideas that draw their power from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. We stand, as we say, united in the name of these sacred principles. But, indeed, it is in the name of these same principles that we ceaselessly contend, affirming our ideals even as we do them violence.

For while we are but human and thus given to the fears and temptations of the flesh, we are dedicated to principles that are abstract, ideal, spiritual: principles that were conceived linguistically and committed to paper during that contention over political ideals and economic interests which was released and given focus during the period of our revolutionary break with traditional forms of society; principles that were enshrined—again linguistically—in the documents of state upon which this nation was founded. Actuated by passionate feats of revolutionary will which released that dynamic power for moralizing both man and nature, instinct and society, which is a property of linguistic forms of symbolic action, these principles—democracy, equality, individual freedom, and universal justice—now move us as articles of faith. Holding them sacred, we act (or *fail* to act) in their names. And in the freewheeling fashion of words that are summoned up to name the ideal, they prod us ceaselessly toward the refinement and perfection of those formulations of policy and configurations of social forms of which they are the signs and symbols. As we strive to conduct social action in accordance with the ideals they evoke, they in turn insist upon being made flesh. Inspiriting our minds

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and bodies, they dance around in our bones, spurring us to make them ever more manifest in the structures and processes of ourselves and of our society. As a nation, we exist in the communication of our principles; thus we argue over their application and interpretation as over the rights of property or the exercise and sharing of authority. As elsewhere, they influence our expositions in the area of artistic form and are involved in our search for a system of aesthetics capable of projecting our corporate, pluralistic identity. They interrogate us endlessly as to who and what we are; they demand that we keep the democratic faith.

Words that evoke our principles are, according to Kenneth Burke, charismatic terms for transcendent order, for perfection. Being forms of symbolic action, they tend, through their nature as language, to sweep us in tow as they move by a process of linguistic negation toward the ideal. As a form of *symbolic* action, they operate by negating nature as a given and amoral condition, creating endless series of man-made or man-imagined positives. By so doing, they nudge us toward that state of human rectitude for which, ideally, we strive. In this way, Burke contends, man uses language to moralize both nature and himself. Thus in this nation the word democracy possesses the aura of what Burke calls a "god-term," and all that we are, and do, exists in the magnitude of its intricate symbolism. It is the rock upon which we toil, and we thrive or wane in the communication of those symbols and processes set in motion in its name.

In our national beginnings, all redolent with Edenic promises, was the word *democratic*, and since we vowed in a war rite of blood and sacrifice to keep its commandments, we act in the name of a word made sacred. Yes, but since we are, as Burke holds, language-using, language-misusing animals—beings who are by nature vulnerable to both the negative *and* the positive promptings of language as symbolic action—we Americans are given to eating, regurgitating, and, alas, re-eating even our most sacred words. It is as though they contain a substance that is crucial to our national existence but that, except in minute and infrequently ingested doses, we find extremely indigestible. Some would call this national habit of word eating an exercise in the art of the impossible; others attribute it to the limitations imposed by the human condition. Still others would describe it as springing from the pathology of social hierarchy, a reaction to certain built-in conditions of our democracy that are capable of amelioration but impossible to cure. Whatever the case may be, it would seem that for many our cultural diversity is as indigestible as the concept of democracy in which it is grounded. For one thing, principles in action are enactments of ideals grounded in a vision of perfection that transcends the limitations of death and dying. By arousing in the believer a sense of the disrelation between the ideal

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and the actual, between the perfect word and the errant flesh, they partake of mystery. Here the most agonizing mystery sponsored by the democratic ideal is that of our unity-in-diversity, our oneness-in-manyness. Pragmatically, we cooperate and communicate across this mystery, but the problem of identity that it poses often goads us to symbolic acts of disaffiliation. Thus we seek psychic security from within our inherited divisions of the corporate American culture while gazing out upon our fellows with a mixed attitude of fear, suspicion, and yearning. We repress an underlying anxiety aroused by the awareness that we are representative not only of one, but of several overlapping and constantly shifting social categories; and we stress our affiliation with that segment of the corporate culture which has emerged out of our parents' past—racial, cultural, religious—and which we assume, on the basis of such magical talismen as our mother's milk or father's beard, that we "know." Grounding our sense of identity in such primary and affect-charged symbols, we seek to avoid the mysteries and pathologies of the democratic process. But that process was designed to overcome the dominance of tradition by promoting an open society in which the individual could achieve his potential unhindered by his ties to the past. Here, theoretically, social categories are open, and the individual is not only considered capable of transforming himself but is encouraged to do so. However, in undertaking such transformations he opts for that psychic uncertainty which is a condition of his achieving his potential—a state he yearns to avoid. So despite any self-assurance he might achieve in dealing with his familiars, he is nevertheless (and by the nature of his indefinite relationship to the fluid social hierarchy) a lonely individual who must find his own way within a crowd of other lonely individuals. Here the security offered by his familiar symbols of identity is equivocal. And an overdependence upon them as points of orientation leads him to become bemused, gazing backward at a swiftly receding—if not quasi-mythical—past, while stumbling headlong into a predescribed but unknown future.

So perhaps we shy from confronting our cultural wholeness because it offers no easily recognizable points of rest, no facile certainties as to who, what, or where (culturally or historically) we are. Instead, the whole is always in cacophonic motion. Constantly changing its mode, it appears as a vortex of discordant ways of living and tastes, values and traditions; a whirlpool of odds and ends in which the past courses in uneasy juxtaposition with those bright, futuristic principles and promises to which we, as a nation, are politically committed. In our vaguely perceived here and now, even the sounds and symbols spun off by the clashing of group against group appear not only alarmingly off-key, but threatening to our inherited eyes, ears, and appetites. Thus in our

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intergroup familiarity there is a brooding strangeness and in our underlying sense of alienation a poignant—although distrusted—sense of fraternity. Deep down, the American condition is a state of unease.

During the nineteenth century, an attempt was made to impose a loose conceptual order upon the chaos of American society by viewing it as a melting pot. Today that metaphor is noisily rejected, vehemently disavowed. In fact, it has come under attack in the name of the newly fashionable code word "ethnicity," reminding us that in this country code words are linguistic agencies for the designation of sacrificial victims, and are circulated to sanction the abandonment of policies and the degrading of ideals. So today, before the glaring inequities, unfulfilled promises, and rich possibilities of democracy, we hear heady evocations of European, African, and Asian backgrounds accompanied by chants proclaiming the inviolability of ancestral blood. Today blood magic and blood thinking, never really dormant in American society, are rampant among us, often leading to brutal racial assaults in areas where these seldom occurred before. And while this goes on, the challenge of arriving at an adequate definition of American cultural identity goes unanswered. (What, by the way, is one to make of a white youngster who, with a transistor radio, screaming a Stevie Wonder tune, glued to his ear, shouts racial epithets at black youngsters trying to swim at a public beach—and this in the name of the ethnic sanctity of what has been declared a neighborhood turf?)

The proponents of ethnicity—ill concealing an underlying anxiety, and given a bizarre bebopish stridency by the obviously American vernacular inspiration of the costumes and rituals ragged out to dramatize their claims to ethnic (and genetic) insularity—have helped give our streets and campuses a rowdy, All Fool's Day, carnival atmosphere. In many ways, then, the call for a new social order based upon the glorification of ancestral blood and ethnic background acts as a call to cultural and aesthetic chaos. Yet while this latest farcical phase in the drama of American social hierarchy unfolds, the irrepressible movement of American culture toward the integration of its diverse elements continues, confounding the circumlocutions of its staunchest opponents.

In this regard I am reminded of a light-skinned, blue-eyed, Afro-American-featured individual who could have been taken for anything from a sun-tinged white Anglo-Saxon, an Egyptian, or a mixed-breed American Indian to a strayed member of certain tribes of Jews. This young man appeared one sunny Sunday afternoon on New York's Riverside Drive near 151st Street, where he disrupted the visual peace of the promenading throng by racing up in a shiny new blue Volkswagen Beetle decked out with a gleaming Rolls Royce radiator. As the flow of strollers came to an abrupt halt, this man of parts emerged from his

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carriage with something of that magical cornucopian combustion by which a dozen circus clowns are exploded from an even more miniaturized automobile. Looming as tall as a professional basketball center, he unfolded himself and stretched to his full imposing height.

Clad in handsome black riding boots and fawn-colored riding breeches of English tailoring, he took the curb wielding—with an ultra-pukka-sahib haughtiness—a leather riding crop. A dashy dashiki (as bright and as many-colored as the coat that initiated poor Joseph's troubles in biblical times) flowed from his broad shoulders down to the arrogant, military flare of his breeches-tops, while six feet, six inches or so above his heels, a black Homburg hat, tilted at a jaunty angle, floated majestically on the crest of his huge Afro-coiffed head.

As though all this were not enough to amaze, delight, or discombobulate his observers—or precipitate an international incident involving charges of a crass invasion of stylistic boundaries—he proceeded to unlimber an expensive Japanese single-lens reflex camera, position it atop the ornamental masonry balustrade which girds Riverside Park in that area, and activate its self-timer. Then, with a ballet leap across the walk, he assumed a position beside his car. There he rested his elbow upon its top, smiled, and gave himself sharp movie director's commands as to desired poses, then began taking a series of self-portraits. This done, he placed the camera upon the hood of his Volkswagen and took another series of self-shots in which, manipulating a lengthy ebony cigarette holder, he posed himself in various fanciful attitudes against the not-too-distant background of the George Washington Bridge. All in all, he made a scene to haunt one's midnight dreams and one's noon repose.

Now, I can only speculate as to what was going on in the elegant gentleman's mind, who he was, or what visual statement he intended to communicate. I only know that his carefully stylized movements (especially his "pimp-limp" walk) marked him as a native of the U.S.A., a home-boy bent upon projecting and recording with native verve something of his complex sense of cultural identity. Clearly he had his own style; but if—as has been repeatedly argued—the style is the man, who on earth was this fellow? Viewed from a rigid ethno-cultural perspective, neither his features, nor his car, nor his dress was of a whole. Yet he conducted himself with an obvious pride of person and of property, inviting all and sundry to admire and wonder in response to himself as his own sign and symbol, his own work of art. He had gotten himself, as the Harlem saying goes, "together," and whatever sheerly ethnic identity was communicated by his costume depended upon the observer's ability to see order in an apparent cultural chaos. The man himself was hidden somewhere within, his complex identity concealed by his aesthetic gesturing. And his essence lay, not in the somewhat comic clash-

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ing of styles, but in the mixture, the improvised form, the willful juxtaposition of modes.

Perhaps to the jaundiced eyes of an adversary of the melting-pot concept, the man would have appeared to be a militant black nationalist bent upon dramatizing his feelings of alienation—and he might have been. But most surely he was not an African or an Englishman. His Volks–Rolls Royce might well have been loaded with Marxist tracts and Molotov cocktails, but his clashing of styles nevertheless sounded an integrative, vernacular note—an American compulsion to improvise upon the given. His garments were, literally and figuratively, of many colors and cultures, his racial identity interwoven of many strands. Whatever his politics, sources of income, hierarchal status, and such, he revealed his essential "Americanness" in his freewheeling assault upon traditional forms of the Western aesthetic. Whatever the identity he presumed to project, he was exercising an American freedom and was a product of the melting pot and the conscious or unconscious comedy it brews. Culturally, he was an American joker. If his Afro and dashiki symbolized protest, his boots, camera, Volkswagen, and Homburg imposed certain qualifications upon that protest. In doing so they played irreverently upon the symbolism of status, property, and authority, and suggested new possibilities of perfection. More than expressing protest, these symbols ask the old, abiding American questions: Who am I? What about me?

Still, ignoring such questions (as they would ignore the little man of Chehaw Station), the opponents of the melting-pot concept utter their disavowals with an old-fashioned, camp-meeting fervor—solemnly, and with an air of divine revelation. Most amazingly, these attacks upon the melting pot are led by the descendants of peasants, or slaves, or inhabitants of European ghettos—people whose status as spokesmen is a product of that very melting of hierarchal barriers they now deny. With such an attitude, it is fortunate that they, too, are caught up in the society's built-in, democracy-prodded movement toward a perfection of self-definition. Hence such disavowals, despite their negative posture, have their positive content. And to the extent that they are negatives uttered in an attempt to create certain attitudes and conditions that their exponents conceive as positives, these disavowals are, in part, affirmations of the diverse and unique pasts out of which have emerged the many groups that this nation comprises. As such they might well contribute to a clarification of our pluralistic cultural identity, and are thus a step in the direction of creating a much-needed cultural introspection.

As of now, however, I see the denial of that goal of cultural integration for which the melting pot was an accented metaphor as the current form of an abiding American self-distrust. I see it as an effort to

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dismiss the mystery of American identity (our unity-within-diversity) with a gesture of democracy-weary resignation, as an attempt to dispel by sociological word-magic the turbulence of the present, and as a self-satisfied vote against that hope which is so crucial to our cultural and political fulfillment. For if such disavowals be viable, what about the little man behind the stove?

Ironically, the attacks on the melting-pot idea issue from those who have "made it." Having been reborn into a higher hierarchal status, they now view those who have not made it as threats to their newly achieved status, and hence would change both the rules and the game plan. Thus they demonstrate anew the built-in opportunism of their characteristically American shortness of memory. But lest we ourselves forget, the melting-pot concept was never so simplistic or abstract as current arguments would have it. Americans of an earlier day, despite their booster extravagances, recognized the difference between the ideal and the practical—even as they clung desperately to, and sought to default upon, the responsibilities that went with achieving their democratic ideal. Their outlook was pragmatic, their way with culture vernacular, an eclectic mixing of modes. Having rejected the hierarchal ordering of traditional societies, they improvised their culture as they did their politics and institutions: touch and go, by ear and by eye; fitting new form to new function, new function to old form. Deep down they sensed that in the process of nation building their *culture*, like their institutions, was always more "American" (that futuristic concept) than they could perceive—or even fully accept—it to be. Even the slaves, although thrust below the threshold of social hierarchy, were given a prominent place in our national iconography; their music, poetic imagery, and choreography were grudgingly recognized as seminal sources of American art. In the process of creating (and re-creating or diverting) themselves, the melting-pot Americans brazenly violated their ideals. They kept slaves or battened on the products of slave labor. They exploited and abused those who arrived later than themselves—kinsmen and aliens alike. While paying lip service to their vaunted forms of justice, they betrayed, brutalized, and scapegoated one another in the name of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Ten Commandments. But because of their fidelity to their parents' customs and their respect for the pieties of their traditions—if not for those of their fellows—none of the groups that made up the total culture ever really desired to lose its sense of its unique past, not even when that past lay clouded in slavery.

Instead, they wished to use the techniques, ways of life, and values developed within their respective backgrounds as sources of morale in that continuing process of antagonistic cooperation, of adjusting the past

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to the present in the interest of the future, which was so necessary in building what they imagined as a more humane society. Indeed, during their most candid, self-accepting moments they saw themselves as living embodiments of the ancestral past, people who had seized the democracy-sponsored opportunity to have a second chance. As such, they saw themselves as the best guarantee that whatever was most desirable and salvageable from that past would be retained and brought to flower, free of hierarchal hindrances. The little man behind the stove would know from his own condition that the melting-pot concept was a conceit, but his forced awareness of American cultural pluralism would assure him that it was by no means the product of a con game contrived by the powerful. Here not even the powerful were so perceptive.

So our current disavowals are not only misdirected; they are productive of more social disorder, more crises of cultural and personal identity than they could possibly resolve. It is here, on the level of culture, that the diverse elements of our various backgrounds, our heterogeneous pasts, have indeed come together, "melted," and undergone metamorphosis. It is here, if we would but recognize it, that elements of the many available tastes, traditions, ways of life, and values that make up the total culture have been ceaselessly appropriated and made their own—consciously, unselfconsciously, or imperialistically—by groups and individuals to whose own backgrounds and traditions they are historically alien. Indeed, it was through this process of cultural appropriation (and misappropriation) that Englishmen, Europeans, Africans, and Asians *became* Americans.

The Pilgrims began by appropriating the agricultural, military, and meteorological lore of the Indians—including much of their terminology. The Africans, thrown together from numerous ravaged tribes, took up the English language and the biblical legends of the ancient Hebrews and were "Americanizing" themselves long before the American Revolution. They also had imposed upon them a goodly portion of European chromosomes, and thereby "inherited" both an immunity to certain European diseases and a complexity of bloodlines and physical characteristics that have much to do with the white American's reluctance to differentiate between race and culture, African and American, and are a major source of our general confusion over American identity. One of the many questions posed by the man on Riverside Drive is how one so "white" could be simply "black" without being impossibly simple-minded. Especially when his skin and facial bone structure ask, "Where went the blood of yesteryear?" And there is no point in answering the question as did Villon, because the man's face was as Anglo and his hairstyle as Afro as his car's radiator and body were English and German.

Everyone played the appropriation game. The whites took over any

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elements of Afro-American culture that seemed useful: the imagery of folklore, ways of speaking, endurance of what appeared to be hopeless hardship, and singing and dancing—including the combination of Afro-American art forms that produced the first musical theater of national appeal—the minstrel show. And in improvising their rather tawdry and opportunistic version of a national mythology, the moviemakers—Christian and Jewish, northerners and southerners—ransacked and distorted to their own purposes the backgrounds and images of everyone, including the American Indians.

So, melting-pot disclaimers notwithstanding, Americans seem to have sensed intuitively that the possibility of enriching the individual self by such pragmatic and opportunistic appropriations has constituted one of the most precious of their many freedoms. Having opted for the new, and being unable to create it out of thin air or from words inscribed on documents of state, they did what came naturally: they pressured the elements of the past and present into new amalgams. In lieu of a usable cultural tradition there were always the cultural improvisations of the Afro-Americans, the immigrants, or design-gifted religious groups like the Shakers—all so close to eye and ear, hand and imagination. Considering that the newness achieved by Americans has often been a matter of adapting to function and a matter of naming—of designation—we are reminded of how greatly the "Americanness" of American culture has been a matter of Adamic wordplay—of trying, in the interest of a futuristic dream, to impose unity upon an experience that changes too rapidly for linguistic or political exactitude. In this effort we are often less interested in what we are than in projecting what we will to be. But in our freewheeling appropriations of culture we appear to act on the assumption that, as members of a "nation of nations," we are, by definition and by the processes of democratic cultural integration, the inheritors, creators, and creations of a culture of cultures.

So perhaps the complex actuality of our cultural pluralism is perplexing because the diverse interacting elements that surround us, traditional and vernacular, not only elude accepted formulations, but take on a character that is something other than their various parts. Our old familiar pasts become, in juxtaposition with elements appropriated from other backgrounds, incongruously transformed, exerting an energy (or synergy) of a different order than that generated by their separate parts. And this with incalculable results. Nor should we forget the role played by objects and technology in the integration of our cultural styles and in the regional and political unification of the nation. If we put the blues, bluegrass music, English folk songs, et cetera, together with Afro-American rhythms and gospel shouts, we have—God help us—first rock and now "funk," that most odoriferous of musical(?) styles. Still, such mix-

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tures of cultural elements are capable of igniting exciting transformations of culture. Even more mysteriously (and here, perhaps, we have a further source of the little man of Chehaw Station's rich sensibility), they provide for exciting and most unexpected metamorphoses within the self-creating personality.

Frankly, many of the foregoing speculations have been arrived at over the years since I left Tuskegee. If I had been more mature or perceptive back when I first heard of the little man behind the stove, an object that lay atop Miss Harrison's piano would have been most enlightening. It was a signed Prokofiev manuscript that had been presented to her by the composer. Except for the signature it looked like countless other manuscripts. Yet I suspect that to anyone who possessed a conventional notion of cultural and hierarchal order its presence in such a setting would have been as incongruous as a Gutenberg Bible on the altar of a black sharecropper's church, or a dashiki worn with a Homburg hat. Still, there it was: an artifact of contemporary music, a folio whose signs and symbols resonated in that setting with the intricate harmonies of friendship, admiration, and shared ideals through which it had found its way from Berlin to Tuskegee. Once there, and the arrangement of society beyond the campus notwithstanding, it spoke eloquently of the unstructured possibilities of culture in this pluralistic democracy. Yet despite its meticulous artistic form, in certain conventional minds its presence could arouse intimations of the irrational—of cultural, if not social, chaos.

Given the logic of a society ordered along racial lines, Miss Harrison's studio (or even the library) was simply off limits for such an artifact, certainly in its original form. But there it was, lying in wait to play havoc with conventional ideas of order, lending a wry reality to Malraux's observation that art is an assault upon logic. Through its presence, the manuscript had become an agency of cultural transformation and synthesis. By charging Miss Harrison's basement studio with the spirit of living personages, ideals, and purposes from afar, it had transformed that modest room from a mere spot on a segregated Negro campus into an advanced outpost on the frontiers of contemporary music, thus adding an unexpected (if undetected) dimension to Alabama's cultural atmosphere. In my innocence I viewed the manuscript as a property of Miss Harrison's, a sign of her connection with gifted artists across the ocean. It spoke to me of possibility. But that it also endowed the scene—place, studio, campus—with a complex cultural ambiguity escaped my conscious mind. Though aware of certain details of the total scene, I was unattuned to the context in which they sounded, the cultural unity-within-diversity that the combination of details made manifest. Perhaps we are able to see only that which we are prepared to see, and in our culture

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the cost of insight is an uncertainty that threatens our already unstable sense of order and requires a constant questioning of accepted assumptions.

Had I questioned Miss Harrison as to how the racial identity of her little Chehaw man squared with the culture she credited to him, she might well have replied:

"Look, baby, the society beyond this campus is constantly trying to confuse you as to the relationship between culture and race. Well, if you ask me, artistic talent might have something to do with race, but you do *not* inherit culture and artistic skill through your genes. No, sir. These come as a result of personal conquest, of the individual's applying himself to that art, that music—whether jazz, classical, or folk—which helps him to realize and complete himself. And that's true *wherever* the music or art of his choice originates."

Or, in the words of André Malraux (whom I was to discover a year or two later), she might have told me that music is important as an artistic form of symbolic action "because its function is to let men escape from their human condition, not by means of an evasion, but through a possession, [for] art is a way of possessing destiny." And that therefore, even at racially segregated Tuskegee (as witnessed by, among countless other details, the library and her Prokofiev manuscript), one's "cultural heritage is the totality, not of works that men must respect [or that are used to enhance the mystifications that support an elite], but those that can help them live." Entering into a dialogue with Malraux, she might have added on a more specifically American note: "Yes, and most important, you must remember that in this country things are always all-shook-up, so that people are constantly moving around and, culturally, rubbing off on one another. Nor should you forget that here all things—institutions, individuals, and roles—offer more than the function assigned them—because beyond their intended function they provide forms of education and criticism. They challenge, they ask questions, they offer suggestive answers to those who would pause and probe their mystery. Most of all, remember that it is not only the images of art or the sound of music that pass through walls to give pleasure and inspiration—it is in the very *spirit* of art to be defiant of categories and obstacles. They are, as transcendent forms of symbolic expression, agencies of human freedom."

Three years later, after having abandoned my hope of becoming a musician, I had just about forgotten Miss Harrison's mythical little man behind the stove. Then, in faraway New York, concrete evidence of his actual existence arose and blasted me like the heat from an internally combusted ton of coal.

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As a member of the New York Writers' Project, I was spending a clammy, late fall afternoon of freedom circulating a petition in support of some now long-forgotten social issue that I regarded as indispensable to the public good. I found myself inside a tenement building in San Juan Hill, a Negro district that disappeared with the coming of Lincoln Center. Starting on the top floor of the building, I had collected an acceptable number of signatures and, having descended from the ground floor to the basement level, was moving along the dimly lit hallway toward a door through which I could hear loud voices. They were male Afro-American voices, raised in violent argument. The language was profane, the style of speech a southern idiomatic vernacular such as was spoken by formally uneducated Afro-American workingmen. Reaching the door, I paused, sounding out the lay of the land before knocking to present my petition.

But my delay led to indecision. Not, however, because of the loud, unmistakable anger sounding within; being myself a slum dweller, I knew that voices in slums are often raised in anger, but that the *rhetoric* of anger, being in itself cathartic, is not necessarily a prelude to physical violence. Rather, it is frequently a form of symbolic action, a verbal equivalent of fisticuffs. No, I hesitated because I realized that behind the door a mystery was unfolding. A mystery so incongruous, outrageous, and surreal that it struck me as a threat to my sense of rational order. It was as though a bizarre practical joke had been staged and its perpetrators were waiting for me, its designated but unknowing scapegoat, to arrive; a joke designed to assault my knowledge of American culture and its hierarchal dispersal. At the very least, it appeared that my pride in my knowledge of my own people was under attack.

For the angry voices behind the door were proclaiming an intimate familiarity with a subject of which, by all the logic of their linguistically projected social status, they should have been oblivious. The subject of their contention confounded all my assumptions regarding the correlation between educational levels, class, race, and the possession of conscious culture. Impossible as it seemed, these foulmouthed black workingmen were locked in verbal combat over which of two celebrated Metropolitan Opera divas was the superior soprano!

I myself attended the opera only when I could raise the funds, and I knew full well that opera going was far from the usual cultural pursuit of men identified with the linguistic style of such voices. And yet, confounding such facile logic, they were voicing (and loudly) a familiarity with the Met far greater than my own. In their graphic, irreverent, and vehement criticism they were describing not only the sopranos' acting abilities but were ridiculing the gestures with which each gave animation to her roles, and they shouted strong opinions as to the ranges of

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the divas' vocal equipment. Thus, with such a distortion of perspective being imposed upon me, I was challenged either to solve the mystery of their knowledge by entering into their midst or to leave the building with my sense of logic reduced forever to a level of college-trained absurdity.

So challenged, I knocked. I knocked out of curiosity, I knocked out of outrage. I knocked in fear and trembling. I knocked in anticipation of whatever insights—malicious or transcendent, I no longer cared which—I would discover beyond the door.

For a moment there was an abrupt and portentous silence; then came the sound of chair legs thumping dully upon the floor, followed by further silence. I knocked again, loudly, with an authority fired by an impatient and anxious urgency.

Again silence—until a gravel voice boomed an annoyed "Come in!"

Opening the door with an unsteady hand, I looked inside, and was even less prepared for the scene that met my eyes than for the content of their loud-mouthed contention.

In a small, rank-smelling, lamp-lit room, four huge black men sat sprawled around a circular dining-room table, looking toward me with undisguised hostility. The sooty-chimneyed lamp glowed in the center of the bare oak table, casting its yellow light upon four water tumblers and a half-empty pint of whiskey. As the men straightened in their chairs I became aware of a fireplace with a coal fire glowing in its grate, and leaning against the ornate marble facing of its mantelpiece, I saw four enormous coal scoops.

"All right," one of the men said, rising to his feet. "What the hell can we do for *you?*"

"And we ain't buying nothing, buddy," one of the seated men added, his palm slapping the table.

Closing the door, I moved forward, holding my petition like a flag of truce before me, noting that the men wore faded blue overalls and jumper jackets, and becoming aware that while all were of dark complexion, their blackness was accentuated in the dim lamplight by the dust and grime of their profession.

"Come on, man, speak up," the man who had arisen said. "We ain't got all day."

"I'm sorry to interrupt," I said, "but I thought you might be interested in supporting my petition," and began hurriedly to explain.

"Say," one of the men said, "you look like one of them relief investigators. You're not out to jive us, are you?"

"Oh, no, sir," I said. "I happen to work on the Writers' Project. . . ."

The standing man leaned toward me. "You on the Writers' Project?" he said, looking me up and down.

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"That's right," I said. "I'm a writer."

"Now is that right?" he said. "How long you been writing?"

I hesitated. "About a year," I said.

He grinned, looking at the others. "Y'all hear that? Ole Home-boy here has done up and jumped on the *gravy* train! Now that's pretty good. Pretty damn good! So what did you do before that?" he said.

"I studied music," I said, "at Tuskegee."

"Hey, now!" the standing man said. "They got a damn good choir down there. Y'all remember back when they opened Radio City? They had that fellow William L. Dawson for a director. Son, let's see that paper."

Relieved, I handed him the petition, watching him stretch it between his hardened hands. After a moment of soundlessly mouthing the words of its appeal, he gave me a skeptical look and turned to the others.

"What the hell," he said, "signing this piece of paper won't do no good, but since Home here's a musician, it won't do us no harm to help him out. Let's go along with him."

Fishing a blunt-pointed pencil from the bib of his overalls, he wrote his name and passed the petition to his friends, who followed suit.

This took some time, and as I watched the petition move from hand to hand, I could barely contain myself or control my need to unravel the mystery that had now become far more important than just getting their signatures on my petition.

"There you go," the last one said, extending the petition toward me. "Having our names on there don't mean a thing, but you got 'em."

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you very much."

They watched me with amused eyes, expecting me to leave, but, clearing my throat nervously, I stood in my tracks, too intrigued to leave and suddenly too embarrassed to ask my question.

"So what'er you waiting for?" one of them said. "You got what you came for. What else do you want?"

And then I blurted it out. "I'd like to ask you just one question," I said.

"Like what?" the standing one said.

"Like where on earth did you gentlemen learn so much about grand opera?"

For a moment he stared at me with parted lips; then, pounding the mantelpiece with his palm, he collapsed with a roar of laughter. As the laughter of the others erupted like a string of giant firecrackers I looked on with growing feelings of embarrassment and insult, trying to grasp the handle to what appeared to be an unfriendly joke. Finally, wiping coal-dust-stained tears from his cheeks, he interrupted his laughter long enough to initiate me into the mystery.

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"Hell, son," he laughed, "we learned it down at the Met, that's where . . ."

"You learned it *where?*"

"At the Metropolitan Opera, just like I told you. Strip us fellows down and give us some costumes and we make about the finest damn bunch of Egyptians you ever seen. Hell, we been down there wearing leopard skins and carrying spears or waving things like palm leafs and ostrich-tail fans for *years!*"

Now, purged by the revelation, and with Hazel Harrison's voice echoing in my ears, it was my turn to roar with laughter. With a shock of recognition I joined them in appreciation of the hilarious American joke that centered on the incongruities of race, economic status, and culture. My sense of order restored, my appreciation of the arcane ways of American cultural possibility was vastly extended. The men were products of both past *and* present; were both coal heavers *and* Met extras; were both workingmen *and* opera buffs. Seen in the clear, pluralistic, melting-pot light of American cultural possibility there was no contradiction. The joke, the apparent contradiction, sprang from my attempting to see them by the light of social concepts that cast less illumination than an inert lump of coal. I was delighted, because during a moment when I least expected to encounter the little man behind the stove (Miss Harrison's vernacular music critic, as it were), I had stumbled upon four such men. Not behind the stove, it is true, but even more wondrously, they had materialized at an even more unexpected location: at the depth of the American social hierarchy and, of all possible hiding places, behind a coal pile. Where there's a melting pot there's smoke, and where there's smoke it is not simply optimistic to expect fire, it's imperative to watch for the phoenix's vernacular, but transcendent, rising.

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The Dream Game

D. M. Thomas

There was a black girl
who was so beautiful all the white men slept with her.
She had a hunter, an analyst, a manufacturer, and a poet.
And so clever
she picked up their language from their conversations.

She grew unhappy as
she couldn't dream, and not to dream was a kind of
constipation to the black girl, a growing burden
she grew fat with,
so that they had to buy her a pantygirdle.

We'll make you a dream,
said the analyst, and you must guess what it is.
When she had gone he explained to the others, smiling,
they wouldn't make up a dream
for the black girl, she would make up her own.

If her questions, if her guesses,
he said, contain in the last word the letter e, say yes,
if not, say no. The hunter, the manufacturer,
and the poet smiled,
and they called the black girl back into the room.

They instructed her
to ask them each in turn a question about the dream

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they had made up for her. She could go on questioning
for as long as
she liked. It was important she find her dream.

How their laughter
exploded at her frequent marvelous guesses.
Black girl, they said, this is black magic! and their
beer spluttered out
of their mouths in uncontrollable mirth as she

unwound her dream, her dream
that all four of them had murdered her with knives,
cut her up in the kitchen, and recycled her
into trees, into paper
on which beautiful elegies were written about her.

✪ D. M. THOMAS is a British poet whose most recent books are a new collection, *Love and Other Deaths*, and translations of Anna Akhmatova, *Requiem and Poem Without a Hero*.

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Ways to Say "Wind"

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Moves in the woods without
touching the ground.

Crosses the mountains like a
scarf between peaks.

From a flat and then kicked-up ocean
creams along the shore.

Pummels clouds.

Lets a leaf come down in style.

When the sun goes down brings
the first cold star.

Reminds the valley about snow.

When bushes move talks like
a rabbit.

Lost all night, calls for
friends-help-justice.

Remembers the dead.

✪WILLIAM STAFFORD teaches literature at Lewis and Clark College. A new collection of his poems, *Stories That Could Be True*, is scheduled for publication this year.

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Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man

LEON EDEL

> Socrates: *I consider that the old have gone before us along a road which we must all travel in our turn and it is good we should ask them of the nature of that road, whether it be rough and difficult, or easy and smooth.*
>
> —Plato, *The Republic*

IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH GOETHE, the stolid and meticulous Johann Eckermann records a ride to Erfurt on an April day in 1827. Goethe, then seventy-eight, looked attentively at the landscape and remarked, in passing, that nature is always filled with good intentions, but—one had to admit it—nature is not always beautiful. By way of illustration, the master then began a disquisition on the oak. Sometimes an oak, crowded by other trees, grows high and thin, spends its freshest powers "making it" to air and sunshine, and ends up with an overblown crown on a thin body. Then there is the oak that springs up in moist and marshy soil. Overindulged and squat, it is nourished too quickly into an indented, stubborn obesity. Its unfortunate brother may lodge in poor, stony soil on a mountain slope; lacking free development, it becomes knotty and gnarled. Such trees, Goethe said, can hardly be called beautiful—at least they are not beautiful as oak trees.

Then Goethe described to the recording Eckermann the perfect oak. It grows in sandy soil, where it spreads its roots comfortably in every direction; it needs space in which to feel on all sides the effects of sun, wind, rain, light. "If it grows up snugly sheltered from wind and weather," said Goethe, "it becomes nothing. But a century's struggle with the elements makes it strong and powerful, so that, at its full growth, its presence inspires us with astonishment and admiration."

The author of *Faust* was speaking a piece of autobiography as his

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eightieth birthday drew near: he had been one of the fortunate oaks of literature. Indeed, few can claim such favored circumstances; still fewer survive to full growth; if they do, they consume many years struggling toward light and sun, or are undernourished like the mountain oak, or grow obese from the effects of a soil too moist, a nature too lush. Nature has its own ways of inhibiting and stunting art, of forestalling the ripeness of age. Many artists, mere saplings of promise, are cut off in their precocious youth. And those who survive often remain aging versions of what they have been during their earlier years—that is, individuals who repeat their performances and grow rigid and stale. They have consumed their originality. We can count on our fingers the few artists who surpassed themselves when old, as Goethe did. Among painters, Rembrandt comes to mind. His autobiography, begun early, is spread over many canvases—those marvelous paintings of himself. They show him in jaunty youth, all plumes and velvet jacket; in middle years, with increasing disorder in costume, but the face powerful and arresting; and finally we look upon a watery-eyed and bedraggled old man, but what a magnificent old man! How sure and fine is his self-realization as he confronts his visage in old age! The early swagger gives way to a mixture of resignation and resentment; as an old man he paints himself with an ever greater honesty; the feather and cape have long ago been set aside. There remains only the truth. The artist addresses himself to his truths: the truth of appearance and the truth of feeling, the reality of wrinkles, the delicacy of the bulges under his eyes as they catch the light, the face now set in irreversible lines, yet suggesting wisdom and experience, the acceptance of all life, the recognition that it is usually the journey, and not the arrival, that matters. The artist as an old man knows that life will not offer him any better chance. There is only one chance, and his art has been that chance.

In looking at the splendid finished oaks—in visual art, Leonardo or Michelangelo, Titian or Tintoretto; in music, Bach or even the gnarled Beethoven—we must remind ourselves that some of these men did not live as long as men live today. But art has its own life-span. A finished Mozart died in his unfinished thirties. One thinks of Rimbaud, whose growth as poet came to a stop before he was twenty, although he lived on in the world of commerce; or of the romantics, such lively saplings, who withered or were suddenly cut off close to the ground. The portrait of the artist as a young man is usually the picture of an unfinished artist, one who may not end up as an artist at all. I am convinced that the fictional Stephen Dedalus, arrogant and poised for flight, in his coldness, secrecy, cleverness, had in him nothing but a potential virtuosity. He was all anger; he was mindless with rage. He wrote a single poem, not a very good one, but he called himself an "artist" and wanted the world to give

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him its bounty before he had given the world any proof of his worth.

Portraits of artists as young men speak to us with what Henry James called a "hungry futurity." The portrait of the artist as an old man, on the other hand, is that of the finished oak, standing strong and sometimes beautiful in nature, with a developed and nourished past. Most questions have been answered. The storms and stresses are over. The pain of growth, the anguish of aging, have been surmounted; the radiance and suffering have ended in triumph and fulfillment, even if sometimes in penury and want. Biographers of the young are in a forest of saplings; biographers of the old stand in clearer land, amid a finished forest—a beauty of maturity. All is not perfection; but then nature, as Goethe has taught us, is unsymmetrical, prodigal, often a game of chance.

In literature there are many kinds of aging. One thinks of Coleridge's genius spread in incompleteness and steeped in opium; of Landor's dramatic senility; of Browning in London, prosaic and drowsy after the great poetry of his early years; or of Carlyle's rage and dyspepsia and brilliance. Let me sketch the portraits of three writers—two novelists and one poet—who bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Let us look (as far as biography ever can) at what each represented. Each is a special case, as artists are bound to be. In our empirical way, we might find in these transcendent cases some common aspects of artistic experience, some crises of the imagination and of being, often observed in men of high resource and development. These may permit us to understand, perhaps in a heightened way, some of the human drama and human values in aging.

I

I choose as my first case a Russian master, Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy. He was born in 1828 and died at eighty-two in 1910. He seems at first glance one of Goethe's splendid oaks. He grew up on a large estate, a nobleman, with full opportunity to sink his roots deep into native soil. The young Tolstoy, as well as the old, revealed certain traits and conflicts that embodied the most characteristic struggle of man: the struggle between instincts, which demand freedom, and civilization, which insists upon controls.

Tolstoy never knew his parents. His mother was to him dim and ghostly, probably a screened remembrance, for she died before Tolstoy was two. His father seemed large and authoritative, but he disappeared when Tolstoy was eight. French and German tutors, a series of maiden aunts and cousins, and the life on his estate provided the future writer with an enormous sense of freedom, yet a freedom hedged with emotional restrictions. Tolstoy had the privileges of a young aristocrat at

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large in an accepting world. He had a life of ease that is reflected in all his works—in the lives of Pierre and André and Levin. Yet how deeply troubled a spirit, a spirit brooding and confused. It is a cliché that the nineteenth-century Russians were "melancholy Slavs"; certainly the articulate among them gave the world a sense of yearning and weariness, a chronic soul sickness. "What is life?" they all seem to ask. "What does it mean?" And they give troubled and deeply human answers. Tolstoy had an aloofness that enabled him to see more clearly than most, and the egotism of his privileges, and a curiously low self-esteem, so that his art gave him no solace. It seemed to him a plaything. He was a novelist who wanted to be a philosopher. He wanted systems—for by systems alone could emotion and impulse be given a semblance of control. When young, every time he encountered any subject he experienced an urge to write a treatise on it. Whatever came to hand—religion, music, philosophy, history, conduct—required rules: rules of life, rules for himself and his busy, compulsive, driving mind, and of course rules for everyone else. Some vast inner reservoir of personal grief and insecurity, some strange fear of allowing himself to feel, although he was extraordinarily aware of the feelings of others, made him a prodigy of self-prohibitions, which were, in the aristocratic way, promptly undermined by self-indulgence.

The child Tolstoy was brought up by a clan rather than by emotionally identifiable parents. While that practice is highly successful among some primitive peoples (making children feel that every home is their home), it gave this aristocrat a sense of drift in his youth, even of rootlessness. And how difficult to be a realist who prefers lofty, abstract thoughts about God and society! How exact, how accurate, were his observations when he walked into a room! He could note the button on a cloak and it could tell him things about the wearer; he could capture fleeting expressions on faces, see the fumbling finger, the jerk of the shoulder—he could see *into* people, and their lives, and how they handled their affairs, and could remember all they said. He loved nature, the sensible, visual world, although he lacked a style in putting down what he saw on paper. Yet how could he reconcile all these realities with a kind of inner despair, a God who made life seem arbitrary?

By sixty Tolstoy was world famous, the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* as well as many tales, and tracts on how to lead a good life—according to Tolstoy. He was a Thoreau grown old, a foreshadowing of the future Gandhi, all for nonviolence and passive resistance and self-immolation; the Kingdom of God, he said, was in man. He preached simplicity and chastity, yet could not escape the call of passion in that large bed at Yasnaya Polyana where he fathered thirteen children. After his passionate middle years, sex was still imperious; but when passion was spent, he tended to see his wife as a temptress, and blamed

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himself for his weakness. He entered old age with the step of a patriarch—the long beard, those world-weary wrinkles, a flat nose like that of a prizefighter, a gnarled oak of a man with lively eyes that looked searchingly, always seeking. This man, who seemed to have all the fulfillments of life, somehow felt a lack—of what? Something was missing, as seen in the frown, the rages, the enthusiasms, the prophecies of this rustic primitive genius at large on his lands amid his peasants and disciplines. "*Tak chto zhe nam dyelat*?" That was the title of one of his major essays: "What then must we do?" What *was* there to do? Endowed with abundance, could he give away his property? Put his copyrights in the public domain? Recognize that money is not important? Be a vegetarian? Have no part in the exploitation of man by man? Forswear smoking and self-indulgence? Lead a life of chastity?

He was a bundle of strivings, as Thoreau might have said, but somehow he always checkmated them. "I tell others what to do," said Tolstoy, "but I don't know what to do myself." Some sense of worthlessness, some need to hold himself in low esteem, gave him also a brooding fear of his mortality. He was afraid of death—this man who could understand and feel so much of life. He was the aristocrat in spite of himself, jealous of his prerogatives, yet also insisting he was the friend of the people, at heart closest to his *muzhiks*, his peasants, who never understood what he talked about and suspected his generous impulses. The young Chekhov, visiting Yasnaya Polyana, remarked that Tolstoy's idea was to put himself on the level of the plebeians; what was necessary, said Chekhov, was to educate the plebeians to a higher plane. Tolstoy was indeed a bundle of strivings and contradictions. He was an ardent Slavophile, but he also loved the West; he was hostile to private ownership, but he kept up his estates and added to them, living as a man of wealth. In his youth he was a compulsive gambler, like Dostoevsky; but he repaired his losses ultimately with vast royalties from his writings. He never questioned the fact that so many peasants worked for him and his large family. He abhorred the eating of meat, but he could spend long days hunting. He ate vegetables and grains, but had sudden spurts of gluttony. He lectured his peasants on the evils of tobacco, and dug a ditch and made them throw their pipes into it. Then, returning to his study, he reached for a *papirossa*, a cigarette. He was orthodox and devout, but he defied the church and was ultimately excommunicated. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* he told the world it must be chaste; he quoted Christ and said that a man who lusts after a woman commits adultery deep in his heart. But at that very moment he made his wife pregnant with her thirteenth child.

We must not dismiss Tolstoy as a hypocrite, any more than we would Thoreau for building his hut in a symbolic loneliness, less than a mile

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from his mother's home. Something more profound is at work in such a genius. His sense of chaos and his sense of order are mixed. His feelings are too strong, at times overwhelming, driven by a constant depression from which there seems to be no escape. That depression is written into Tolstoy's fiction. In *War and Peace*, for example, André, a nobleman filled with despair, goes off to the Napoleonic Wars and is wounded. Lying on the battlefield, he looks up into the great immensity of blue sky (who, reading that page, can ever forget it?) and feels the futility of existence. He has an extraordinary yearning to die, and when he returns to his father's estate, he abandons life; it is a kind of abandonment of the life struggle, the life will. The other side of Tolstoy is in the ever-questioning Pierre. A gambler—anarchic, dissipated, made serious by war and suffering—Pierre wants to reform everything, to make a cluttered world shipshape. One side of Tolstoy has to die; the other lives and suffers. Anna Karenina—the feminine side of Tolstoy—throws herself under a train when her great passion has run its course. Passion must be punished. But Levin, like Pierre, goes on living. So Tolstoy sought to kill the art within himself and to live on in a kind of existential brooding, an eternal muddle. Levin, too, thinks he might kill himself, but decides he must make the best of God's world. His meditations on suicide are taken almost verbatim from Tolstoy's personal journal, in which he wrote:

> I was unwilling to act hastily, only because I had determined first to clear away the confusion of my thoughts, and, that once done, I could kill myself. I was happy, yet I hid away a cord, to avoid being tempted to hang myself by it to one of the pegs between the cupboards of my study, where I undressed alone every evening, and ceased carrying a gun because it offered too easy a way of getting rid of life, and yet there was something I hoped for from it.

What strikes us in particular is Tolstoy's psychological sagacity; he understands how people feel and he has a gift for novelistic detail. But in his life he does not apply this sagacity to himself. Even when he says he wants to die, we see that he doesn't really want to—he must put his thoughts in order first. A gun is too easy; apparently he must find something more difficult. This is a man who wants martyrdom, wants someone else to kill him; a soul caught between the empyrean of speculation and a drive to exactitude, yet in reality a soul struggling with passivity, self-indulgence, egotism, unable to reform itself—asking for external forces to deal out justice. From this we may understand how unhappy was Tolstoy's old age. In the midst of his great fame, a world hero, he was a fount of despair. His quarrels with his wife and children are legendary. The Countess Tolstoy was a long-suffering woman of much ability, and Tolstoy's deep dislike of women often emerged in their struggle. In his later years he dwelt, as always, on death, but never

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believed he would die; and although he wrote, on the one hand, his later masterpiece "The Death of Ivan Ilyich," he also wrote the novel entitled *Resurrection*. Life was a purge. Purged, one had to be resigned—until the caldron within boiled over again.

Tolstoy's power as a writer did not diminish with age, but it did not grow. He discovered himself always in his work, yet got no comfort from it. He had no faith in art, no belief in his uniqueness. While in his search for a faith he chose a primitive form of Christianity, he recognized he could not practice his preachings. He tried. And when he broke his own rules there were remorse, self-laceration, and ultimately blame to be placed on the world around him. Again and again he told himself that a man of his beliefs had to live them—that he had to leave his cushioned ease, his servants, his home, and go forth and lead a saintly life. Still, the aristocrat in Tolstoy could not bring himself to become one of God's athletes, a missionary, a martyr. When he finally left home, it was too late. He was eighty-two, and his departure was an act of death. He became ill as he journeyed with his youngest daughter by train. He died in a railroad station, like his heroine Anna Karenina.

Tolstoy's patterns of life turn topsy-turvy the usual patterns of the aging artist. For example, he wrote his autobiographies at the beginning, instead of the end, of his career. *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, his fictional trilogy, made him famous in his twenties, as if he had, in the full force of his manhood, to relive his beginnings. Middle age embodied the years of his richest life—indeed, they had a plenitude that would have sufficed for most men, most artists. The Russian writer raised a large family, experimented with education and farming, and wrote his world masterpieces with consummate power, if not always with an economy of art. But his inner melancholy, his indulged self, brought him to crisis and, as we have seen, to fantasies of suicide. His old age was in reality a chronic crisis that he never resolved. Edmund Wilson argued that his proclaimed love of mankind and his particular religion seem "an arid self-directed exercise that simply raises the worshipper in his own self-esteem." Tolstoy was an angry, forbidding man of high gifts, a Jeremiah—perhaps a supreme example of an artistic power that did not suffice. In tune with the realities of most humans in the crowded scenes of his existence, Tolstoy could not be in tune with the realities of his self.

II

To leap from continental Russia to continental America for our second writer is to take a great leap indeed. Yet while environment and circumstances may differ, artists are made of similar stuff. Henry James, who was born when Tolstoy was fifteen, lived to be seventy-three, dying

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six years after Tolstoy's death. Looking at their parallel lives, we see that whereas Tolstoy came out of feudal Russia, Henry James was a grandchild of the Enlightenment that placed America on the road to a kind of unenlightened egalitarianism. His grandfather had made a fortune in Albany, New York, and James, like Tolstoy, had a spacious childhood. Tolstoy grew up in a family clan; James had loving parents, but he had awareness of clan, both in the big grandmotherly house in Albany and in teeming New York City, where as a small boy playing in muddy streets he saw pigs rooting in the gutters and chickens walking in Washington Square. The novelist's father was a kind of Tolstoy in reverse. Tolstoy wanted rules and regulations to curb his freedom; Henry James's father defied the rigidities of Calvinism and preached the joys of a sensual life as against religious restraint. But in the way of puritanical Americans, the elder James's sensory adventures were tame and intellectual. Simple joys sufficed. Tolstoy had chastening experiences in the Crimean War; Henry James, the future novelist, shrank from the violence of the Civil War, suffering more from a case of nerves than from physical disability. He was exposed early to European culture, acquiring a cosmopolitan spirit without ever having had to be a provincial. Although allowed to enjoy his senses, he also inherited an idea of duty and possessed a desire for fame, fortune, and glory, which he would win by the pen, like Balzac. James did not have Tolstoy's exposure to all kinds and conditions of men in war and peace. James came to life through literature; Tolstoy came to literature through life. Such an epigram, however, would overlook the fact that an artist with a "grasping imagination" and an observant eye can often feel all life, and see it, more powerfully than the one who plunges himself into it.

What I find significant is that while Tolstoy in his twenties wrote his first novels out of early memories of childhood and youth; James wrote his first novel (at thirty, after ten years of apprenticeship) out of maturity. It deals with a young artist who feels he has to choose between art and passion, and is defeated by passion. Tolstoy had gratified his sexual needs from the first, with mistresses or in brothels, but he was a clumsy lover. Sex for the puritan-conditioned James was suppressed, controlled, turned into a problem of conduct—made a part of the art of life. James feared mistresses, and read about brothels in French novels. From the first, his concern was not what to do with the world, which Tolstoy wanted to change into a pastoral, simplified Christian world, but how to make it into a work of beauty and art. James's philosophy was that of a man in search of aesthetic freedom; Tolstoy's was that of a man who feared freedom and legislated for himself out of his own intelligence. James, like Balzac, accepted life—he wasn't the least bit philosophical. In an early essay, he is very clear about this. Life, he writes, is a battle.

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Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, peoples of sense in small, and mankind generally unhappy.

But there was also for James one singular reality:

the world as it stands is no illusion, no phantom, no evil dream of a night; we wake up to it again for ever and ever; we can neither forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it. We can welcome experience as it comes, and give it what it demands, in exchange for something which it is idle to pause to call much or little so long as it contributes to swell the volume of consciousness. In this there is mingled pain and delight, but over the mysterious mixture there hovers a visible rule, that bids us to learn to will and seem to understand.

The world was a spectacle, supplying abundant raw material for art. All the writer had to do was to be artist enough—self-critical, exigent, sentient. The rest was a matter of craft.

With his sexual drive channeled into his art, James felt no need to marry. He was secretive, personal, intimate; even his notebooks are impersonal and professional. The young artist kept strict watch on his passions. He preferred to make love to his obedient and yielding muse. His early novels are novels of society, of the world, of art; they do not deal with love. His first masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady*, is about a young American woman, richly endowed when compared with her European sisters, trying to "affront"—that is James's word—her destiny. But it is her American destiny to be affronted; she is too innocent, too ignorant, too unfinished. James made himself the historian of the unfinished American woman and the American girl, and won early fame. He worked hard; he fled loneliness by mingling in society; he lived an intense, busy London life, a perpetual student of "society." Middle age came upon him unobtrusively. And with it he experienced the first crisis of his aging.

As with Tolstoy, something remained unfulfilled in spite of success. We can see this in James's turning to naturalism and trying to write deterministic novels in the manner of Zola. He wrote *The Bostonians*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Tragic Muse*—novels in which the inner statement is that the world is unkind to sensitive young persons; it is a brutal, philistine world that expends its gifted children and discards them. When these novels failed, he told himself that perhaps he would do better as a playwright. Certainly he would make more money. He tried for five long, busy years to write for the theater. This brought him into backstage reality, a corner of life concerned in a practical way with illusion; and James, the man of the writer's study, felt out of his element. One play was produced, and was a modest success. The second, on which he placed all his hopes, was ill received by a rowdy gallery. James

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himself was booed when he came out to take a bow. January 5, 1895, was the night that marked a fundamental break, a crucial turning point, in James's life. He was fifty-two, and at that moment his world broke in two.

In the ensuing five years we can read what seems to be characteristic of the history of every great artist—that moment when latent depression smothers the creative individual. In this crucible the artist faces his test: he survives or goes under. It came to T. S. Eliot early and he wrote *The Waste Land;* it was a chronic state with Tolstoy, never resolved. It came to Henry James in the moment of high drama when the gallery howled at him (as he said) like a bunch of savages. We need not rehearse the stages of his depression. He did not write about it; perhaps he was aware of it only peripherally and intermittently. He went about London performing his "forms of expression" as if nothing had changed. But the changes are revealed in what he wrote. He wrote a series of short stories about authors who are private successes and public failures—one called "The Death of the Lion," another "The Next Time." His authors in these tales are always too good for their public. The public does not understand them. Then, during these years, James wrote a dozen ghost stories. He lived in a ghost world. He talked of the "black abyss" of the theater, spoke in images of drowning, of trying to keep his head above water. He wrote a novel about a child murdered by drowning. Now, in middle life, he did what Tolstoy did at the beginning: he went back to childhood and set down a series of stories about children victimized by an adult world that appreciates neither their delicacy of feeling nor their fresh perceptions. James's middle-age crisis fascinates us by what his imagination brought forth; the great thing about his despair was that he did not stop writing.

To understand Henry James's old age, we must learn one thing more. In this period, in which his emotions regressed to his childhood, a past of ghosts and extrahuman happenings, he cured himself by his work. Each story released some of his anxiety, discharged his anger, made him feel strong again. In this healing process of art, he opened himself at last to love. He had been a bachelor, a man for whom physical drives were submerged in a drive to power; now, meeting a young American sculptor in Rome, he was able to love him. It was a new experience, a tense and deeply felt moment, and a bitter one. His egotism of art was breached.

He was then fifty-seven. Isn't it "too late, too late?" he asked himself. In his notebook he wrote, "Youth, the most beautiful word in the language." But his youth was gone. He had believed that he had passed the time for passion—and yet at last he felt its meaning. He felt the pain, the pity, the absence of the beloved. The great thing about Henry James is that, face to face with a truth, he was able to accept it. He did not rebel like Tolstoy and try to drive passion out as if it were the devil. He wrote

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his novel on the theme of "Live all you can," and called it *The Ambassadors*—the story of an elderly American like himself who comes to Paris to take a young man back to America, to his mother, but decides the young man is better off living his own life abroad. In this novel he comes to the question of determinism. He doesn't ask, "What is life?" He accepts life. The question he asks is how much of life one can live within the restraints of civilization. One may not be technically a free man; one may be a slave of instincts, drives, conditionings. One is formed by heredity and environment, but one has *the imagination of freedom*, or, as James calls it, "the illusion of freedom." In his old age James was prepared to live by that illusion.

After *The Ambassadors* came *The Wings of the Dove*, a novel in which a young heiress, knowing she must die, feels that she will have "lived" if she can allow herself to love. It is the heiress's fate to be deceived, but she does, in a manner, live. And finally James writes *The Golden Bowl*, his last novel, summing up his experience and his wisdom. In this ultimate work he sees civilization as a series of grandiose myths created by man to mask his rapacity, his deceit, his cruelty, his ability to tell himself falsehoods. The myths themselves are often beautiful falsehoods, designed to hide primitive, cruel things. In living by myth—that is, by imagination—man opens the way to knowledge, to codes and forms of life that impose decency, honor, generosity, love.

While writing his last novels, James recognized and faced his solitude. Without a wife, without children, spending long months in a rural retreat, he could say to a young man who asked him about the art he practiced, "It is a solitude, an absolute solitude." He did not mind growing old, he said. "I quite love my present age [he was fifty-six], and the compensations, simplifications, freedom, independences, memories, advantages of it. But I don't keep it long enough—it passes too quickly." He also added that it takes a whole life to learn how to live, "which is absurd if there's not to be another in which to apply the lessons."

When a younger friend pressed him about his life and asked him what had been its "point of departure"—from what point had he indeed set sail?—he answered:

> I am face to face with it, as one is face to face, at my age, with every successive lost opportunity and with the steady swift movement of the ebb of the great tide—the great tide of which one will never see the turn. The gray years gather; the arid spaces lengthen, damn them!—or at any rate don't shorten; what doesn't come doesn't, and what does does. . . . The port from which I set out was, I think, that of *the essential loneliness of my life*—and it seems to be the port also, in sooth, to which my course again finally directs itself! This loneliness (since I mention it!)—what is it still but the deepest thing about one? Deeper, about *me*, at any rate, than anything else; deeper than my "genius," deeper

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than my "discipline," deeper than my pride, deeper, above all, than the deep counterminings of art.

The answer for James was not a return to the melancholy of the spirit from which he had suffered. He returned instead to America, after an absence of twenty years; he revisited his childhood and youth. He wrote then his moving record, *The American Scene*, mingling memory and nostalgia with prophecy, predicting city blight, waste, ecological ruin, showing in this work an acceptance of himself as old and as having the clairvoyance of his years. He wrote short stories until he was almost seventy; and only then did he embark on his autobiographies, after the death of his brother and emotional rival, William James. He revised minutely his major works for the New York edition, as if he were attempting to live his creative years all over again. He brought together his travel essays. His last ten years were a kind of shoring up of all his writings.

His supreme statement as an old artist is to be found in a letter that he wrote at seventy to Henry Adams. He had sent the second volume of his autobiography to Adams, who for years had been sour with age and disillusion, a disappointed member of a great clan. James's words to Adams ring out as a summons not to bend before the infirmities and physical insults of aging:

> You see I still, in the presence of life (or what you deny to be such), have reactions, as many as possible—and the book I sent you is proof of them. It's, I suppose, because I am that queer monster, the artist, an obstinate finality, an inexhaustible sensibility. Hence the reactions—appearances, memories, many things, go on playing upon it with the consequence that I note and "enjoy" (grim word!) noting. It takes doing—and I *do*. I believe I shall do yet again—it is still an act of life.

For Henry James, aging was "still an act of life" and there was no surrender. "Art makes *life*, makes interest, makes importance," James wrote, exalting the transfiguring imagination. When he lay dying, he insisted on dictating certain reverberating phrases, and when unconscious, in his last hours, his hand still moved spasmodically over the sheet, as if he were writing. He died in full belief in his art, its power, its beauty.

III

That idea of art, of great art, as being a supreme form of life brings me to my third portrait of an artist as an old man. William Butler Yeats is the very archetype of a late flowering and late power, and a towering, controlled rage,

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What shall I do with this absurdity—
O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail.

He is writing at sixty-one:

Never had I more
Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
That more expected the impossible . . .

We are beyond the miseries of Tolstoy, the active acceptances of Henry James. This is a rage of art and a use of this rage to make poetry. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear, written when he was fifty-seven, Yeats described his feelings: "I am tired and in a rage at being old. I am all I ever was and much more, but an enemy has bound me and twisted me so as I can plan and think as I never could, but no longer achieve all I plan and think." Where is such mental energy to go when the body refuses to follow? Yeats accepted aging, but he also defied it and *used* it. He insisted on finding new crystallizations of thought; his anger pushed him to overcome physical lag by a great luminescence of thought and feeling:

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song.
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

We can paint a large portrait indeed of a man who could insist upon "unageing intellect" even while seeing himself as a comic pathetic figure,

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress.

Yeats sang. He sang the tatters in a kind of revenge upon the indignities heaped upon the body. Wherever we turn in those last immortal poems in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* we find the old man surpassing anything he had written in his younger years. We encounter the symbols of his old age and the images of his old age; they

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are not repetitions of images called up by his younger self. They speak out of awareness of the past, his deep national feeling, his sense of himself within his race and as seer and singer. He writes of spirals, gyres, staircases to be climbed, a freedom and loftiness that defy horizontal decay. In his youth he had sung high romance and the Celtic twilight. Hands were pearl-pale, water was foamy-oozy, the dawns were passioned and shod in gold. Beauty there was in abundance, and his lyric sense had a tapestried splendor. His later style is free of book language and romantic convention. The poet uses the spoken word: belly, bum, sop, pun, bowels, randy, codger, leching, warty. He is free in describing passion and sex. He no longer finds euphemisms for the flesh; it is no longer made ethereal. He undergoes one of the fashionable gland operations of that time, the Voronoff monkey-gland graft that promised rejuvenescence, but one wonders whether Yeats needed such a literal step-up of his hormones.

To arrive at such power of utterance, and such heights of vision, Yeats had passed through struggles as profound as those of Tolstoy and James; one might almost say such struggles belong to the laws of art. In his reveries on his childhood and youth (he wrote his autobiographies at fifty) we can read of his years of uncertainty, his wavering between action and dream that we find in so many poets. Like James and Proust, he worked through his childhood in middle age. He had the sexual inhibitions of his Protestantism and a natural fear—it has been called shyness—of women; he had his saturation in the myth and folklore of Ireland, derived in part from his mother; he had the extraordinary clarities of his father, who was a painter—that is, an artist aware of his son's vocation. There had been years of melancholy and depression, and an obsessive love for the beautiful Maud Gonne, who was hard and conspiratorial and revolutionary, as only the Irish can be. Yeats saw her beauty; it blinded him, in a poet's dream of ideal love. In middle life when he was writing his autobiographies—seeking, as it were, the inner sources of his life—he married (in 1917 at fifty-two). With this settling influence and with parenthood (and the end of the First World War), he entered upon the fulfillment that we can read in his verse. It was not a question for Yeats, as it was for James, of "too late? too late?" but rather one of facing and using the growing truth that his body could not keep pace with his surging mind. He made his verse and prose and his plays instruments of intellectual assertion as powerful as any we have had in our time. He had by degrees (and long before his marriage) overcome his sexual fears. And he had by degrees (one can read it in the books about him and in his own autobiographies) found a course between action and dream. The truths of poetry confronted the truths of life. Yeats's marriage led to his writing a book called *A Vision*—a strange search for the

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meaning of the occult, the invisible spirits of his unconscious guiding him to his newfound destinies; a search in which his wife, who had the talents of a medium, participated. For all his belief in some of the old wives' tales of spiritism, Yeats's essential strength lay in his constant ability—and need—to cut through to reality. "We make out of the quarrel with others rhetoric," Yeats wrote, "but of the quarrels with ourselves poetry." His was, we can now see, the most powerful voice in English in our time speaking in behalf of life's mysteries as against scientific realism—the old battle of the naturalists and the symbolists raised to the plane of high poetry. *A Vision* must be taken seriously in spite of its mystifications, for with each insight Yeats seems to be touching, in his poetic way, truths given us in other forms later by Freud and Jung—above all, his recognition of the power latent in the unconscious. Yeats in his terminology describes this as "an energy as yet uninfluenced by thought, action or emotion." We might say he is here defining the id. So too Yeats understood the nature of the personal myth each man and woman creates, the persona, "the image of what we wish to become, or of that to which we give our reverence." He was touching the borders of self-belief and self-concept. He defined the creative mind as "all the mind that is consciously constructive" and called the environment, the general state of physical being of humans, their "body of fate"—a packed, deterministic statement, even if not so intended, in which another might discern the built-in societal and moral values we forge as ego and superego.

I have a memory of Yeats one evening in Montreal, at his hotel: the shock of white hair, the clear, questioning eyes, the restless animal-pacing in his room, the vigor—the boundless vigor—the pounce of an animal all instinct and superb control, control of everything he said. We talk of Joyce and D. H. Lawrence; he wishes to see the best in both. It takes a long time, he says, for a poet to be understood: "we wear our metaphors and rhythms . . . poetry grows slowly, the novel reaches the public with immediacy." Yeats the public figure was but a surface; he spoke in his verse by a sounding of primitive depths—like Conrad, he could tap his unconscious. It is the old Yeats, filled with the pride of his animal power, who could conjure up the beating wings, the shudder in the loins, the earthly visitor from Olympus:

> God guard me from those thoughts men think
> In the mind alone . . .

and he prayed

> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man.

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He wanted "an old man's frenzy." He was ready to remake himself, till he would be Timon or Lear or Blake beating upon the wall—"an old man's eagle mind." The image of the old man reduced to a coat, a tattered garment, the clothes of a scarecrow, comes to us always as a bit of outraged defiance, yet Yeats feels it to be "a comfortable kind of scarecrow."

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention upon my old age;
> They were not such a plague when I was young;
> What else have I to spur me into song?

When he went to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize, Yeats looked at the medal that came to him with Sweden's bounty; it showed a young man listening to the Muse. Yeats thought: "I was good-looking once like that young man, but my unpracticed verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were; and now I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she is like those Angels in Swedenborg's vision, and moves perpetually 'towards the day-spring of her youth.'" Let us remind ourselves that when the Angels of Swedenborg kissed, the kiss was a burst of flame.

Yeats flamed and the flames were brighter for his being old. He had never flamed as much in his youth.

A Russian, an American, an Irishman—three towering writers—one coming to us from an old feudalism, the second from a new ill-at-ease egalitarianism, the third from a land in chronic revolt. Their lands made them; but their personal beings offer us certain general truths that belong above nationality to the universality of the emotions, out of which poems and novels are made. They had in common, all three, the melancholy and despair so often heightened in the lives of artists; each of them had large funds of the egotism of art; they shared man's libidinal drives—sated yet never controlled in Tolstoy, repressed and channeled into art in James, liberated by middle-aged domesticity in Yeats. Tolstoy wanted to be always virginal; James late in life accepted passion as feeling and learned the meaning of love; Yeats recognized the sexual drive and its power by reference to man's primitive state, saying that Christianity had substituted a virgin womb and an empty tomb for the more inclusive phallicism of earlier religions. In their fundamental attitudes toward freedom, we can see in James and Yeats a struggle against the shackles society imposes. They speak of art as the greatest freedom—or, as James put it, the "illusion of freedom"—to be cultivated by man. Tolstoy, coming from a land that was only beginning to learn the meaning of freedom, was a man of rules, laws, precepts. What John

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Butler Yeats, the father of the poet, once said seems applicable to our three artists: that poetry embodies an *absolute* freedom in which the inner and outer self can expand in full satisfaction, but that in religion "there is absent the consciousness of liberty."

If we look at these states of being in all three men, we recognize that aging and creativity are closely linked, that there exists a creative aging. In certain instances, aging is a way of crystallizing and summarizing the life of art and the achievement of art. And when—amid the new despair that aging brings—the artist has experienced fulfillment of certain old unfulfilled needs, then he finds an expanding power of mind and utterance that can bring him to the supremacies of art. When staleness, drink, drugs, or mere cessation does not occur—for these are often common among the younger and middle-aged artists—when the artist has endured and suffered and transcended his sufferings, he becomes one of the transcendent beings of art. Without fulfillment there is misdirected rage: this was Tolstoy. With fulfillment there can be a rage of doing: this was Henry James. And a rage of power, renewed and enlarged by the very process of aging, which becomes in itself the creative force of the old artist: this was Yeats.

Of our three artists it was Tolstoy, so superb in his art, who was incomplete in spite of his outer aspect of venerability and his enormous vitality. Melchior de Vogüé said of Tolstoy that he was "a queer combination of the brain of an English chemist with the soul of an Indian Buddhist." A rum mixture, no doubt—a confusion of specifics with universals. I am haunted by the image of that railway station, of Tolstoy setting out on a literal journey at an age when most artists have already completed their journey. Tolstoy's end was death at a wayside station; Yeats's was a sailing forth to Byzantium, into the glories of the imagination; and in James's final works we find the imagery of voyage and exploration, Columbus and Amerigo—and the narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Out of the sadness and decrepitude of aging, Yeats and James, and those who believe in art, make a hymn to life; they sing life where Tolstoy sang despair; they sing acceptance where Tolstoy sang repudiation. They acknowledge despair, they acknowledge their instincts and their feelings, and grow old without the rigidities of aging. Within the tattered coat upon the stick there is a radiance—the same radiance as in the self-portraits of Rembrandt grown old.

> Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span;
> Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel—
> Wearied aged man.

And, as you travel, say again with Montaigne: "It is not the arrival, it is the journey which matters."

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Richard Hofstadter, C. Wright Mills, and "the Critical Ideal"

RICHARD GILLAM

Unless we insist that politics is imagination and mind, we will learn that imagination and mind are politics, and of a kind that we will not like.
—Lionel Trilling

IT SEEMS ODD, IF NOT BIZARRE, to speak of Richard Hofstadter and C. Wright Mills in the same breath. Temperamentally the men were polar types, a paleface as against a redskin. The ideological wars of our recent past have also cast these two friends, longtime colleagues and exact contemporaries (to the very month), as opposites. Hofstadter remains for some a liberal, for others a conservative. Mills is for almost everyone a radical—"the big daddy of the new left." Most will think of them today in terms of clashing images. The "consensus" historian makes some academic point as the nay-saying sociologist speeds off astride his BMW in full counter-culture cry. The pillar of the "establishment" contends against the guru of the "movement."

Let me take just two statements to illustrate the political dimension of this conflict. The one insists, against radical arguments to the contrary—this in 1950—that public opinion remains a democratic or pluralistic force: "Public opinion in America is not merely a slogan. . . . It is a going fact of how [Americans] conduct their domestic and international affairs." But at almost the same moment in 1950 the other makes quite a different case:

> . . . We have been nourishing big industry and corporate capitalism. . . . We have not yet found adequate means for the control of corporate business, while corporate business has found powerful instruments for the control of the community. . . . Grass roots organs of opinion have now been almost completely replaced by the great mass communication media. . . . We habitually underestimate the concentration of social power that is made possible in our mass society by the opinion making industries. . . . We have been living under a rather genteel form of the garrison state. . . .

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The only problem with this neat demonstration of what everyone expects is that the first defense of pluralist democracy comes not from Richard Hofstadter but from C. Wright Mills. And the second critical estimation of concentrated power on the one side and the mass society on the other comes not from Mills but from Hofstadter. This extreme example is a bit atypical, but it rightly demonstrates a need to rethink the common either-or assessment of two thinkers whose work has had a major influence on our time.

The conventional view inescapably retains, of course, a measure of validity. Mills did end up on the left while Hofstadter strained finally toward the right. Neither should be stripped of his convictions. Yet an ideological approach frozen into simple patterns obscures important aspects of the Mills-Hofstadter connection: that the two always had much in common; that their respective assessments of postwar reality—a key category for both—were in fact quite similar; that their differences, often just of emphasis, derived from temperament and sensibility as well as substance; that some of the antagonism between these two men, as now perceived, did not come sharply into focus until the fire-and-brimstone sixties.

A new look at Mills and Hofstadter illuminates neglected aspects of our recent intellectual history. But more than this, such a reconsideration also helps to solve a puzzle of some significance to crisis-ridden intellectuals of the present moment. How is it that two men so different in personality, sensibility, and (finally) ideology exert what seems to be a common hold on many contemporary scholars of critical inclination? By way of example, one might point to Christopher Lasch as an engaged thinker possessed, to a high degree, of Hofstadter's sensibility and Mills's politics.

In preliminary response to this riddle, let me suggest that Mills and Hofstadter both affirmed, with rare consistency and power, an intellectual principle of transfixing appeal. This principle involved two related presumptions that, taken together, are here termed "the critical ideal." First was the belief that scholars in the "right state," which Emerson described, must critically confront great issues of their age. Responsible intellect would always, in some measure, be adversative and political. But with this went the second and more important conviction that the critical intelligence, contending with reality, was also powerful and autonomous in itself. Ideas counted, they could make a difference—and on their own terms. So while Mills and Hofstadter were political men, they remained, first and foremost, *intellectuals* as opposed to experts, advisers, activists, captives of a party line. Adhering to this critical ideal, they affirmed something in which we all need desperately

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to believe: that the mind, far from having reached "the end of its tether," is still a potent force in human affairs. It is this message that continues to appeal with special poignancy to our own dour and anxious times.

I

Richard Hofstadter and C. Wright Mills met in 1942 as young professors at the University of Maryland—then a "dreary provincial school," as one visitor described it, whose president, H. C. ("Curly") Byrd, was an ex–football coach. Yet College Park had the ingredients of a lively intellectual circle that came to include two young historians, Kenneth Stampp and Frank Freidel, as well as Mills and Hofstadter. Freidel recalled a "great dialogue" that took place at frequent meetings over lunch. Some members of the group also met now and again on Friday evenings to "discuss politics until early Saturday morning." "It is good," Mills wrote of one such session, "to take off your shoes and slump in a chair and talk and talk and talk and write notes about it." ("And then sell it!" he added typically, somewhat spoiling the effect.) He even thought—wrongly, it turned out—that the participants might "combine our efforts and write some political stuff."

It was almost inevitable that Mills and Hofstadter, the closest friends and central figures in this circle, should have disagreed politically. The historian had been born and raised upstate, in Buffalo, but he came intellectually of age during the late 1930s in New York City, where ideological and sectarian warfare made high body counts commonplace. Fascinated by "the blaze of politics" (his own phrase), Hofstadter leaned ideologically to the left and embraced the Progressive-Marxist conviction "that the basic motive power in political behavior is the economic interest of groups." His writing of this period often reverberated with class-conscious rhetoric: capitalists or a "capitalist class" tend to oppose an underdog populace. One of his papers seemed cut to order, or so a reader thought, for the Marxist journal *Science and Society*. Hofstadter wrote his master's thesis on the plight of southern sharecroppers under the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and then went off briefly to Alabama, as if in youthful imitation of James Agee and Walker Evans, to see things for himself. At twenty-one, and probably encouraged by his wife Felice, Hofstadter also flirted for a time with Joe Curran's Communist-influenced National Maritime Union. He even attended a few Party meetings.

Yet such involvement ran against the grain of this highly cerebral young man who described himself, and struck others, as "by temperament quite conservative." His efforts "to participate pretty actively in

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left-wing politics" ultimately proved both uncharacteristic and sobering. "I wasn't meant for it at all," Hofstadter concluded. "I couldn't stomach the ideas or the people." He claimed to lack "the true flame" of old left radicalism. His interest in politics persisted, but it was thereafter laced with skepticism. And he retained from this brief activist experience a lifelong hatred of all vulgar ideologists who enslaved thought to party purpose. By the early 1940s, like other "twice-born" intellectuals of the previous decade, he had moved away from orthodox leftism and come to question many of the old Progressive-Marxist verities. Of the Maryland group Hofstadter alone supported World War II, although he did so critically and without enthusiasm.

Mills had pursued a different course. Coming out of Texas by way of Wisconsin, he had missed the ideological enthusiasms of the so-called "red decade" altogether. "I did not personally experience 'the thirties,' " he once remarked. "At the time, I just didn't get its mood." His radicalism of the early 1940s was therefore once-born—unburdened by old left memories—and it gained intensity as he progressed from the right-wing socialism of the *New Leader* to the antiwar dissent of *Politics*, Dwight Macdonald's iconoclastic periodical. Settling on a radicalism of ultimate ends, he opposed World War II as "a god damned blood bath to no end save misery and *mutual* death to *all* civilized values." Mills proved to be the kind of rambunctious thinker, high on aggression and low on caution, who could unflinchingly explode phrases like "sponge words of political weasels" in the face of his enemies.

If Mills and Hofstadter differed starkly in politics and personality, they nevertheless shared certain affinities and interests. The young sociologist was then, as Freidel put it, "sort of a walking encyclopedia of Max Weber," and his talk of such notions as "charisma and charismatic effects upon people" often filled the air. As time passed, the influence of Weber's whole world view grew more important to both Hofstadter and Mills. Both would attend to bureaucracy, status, the ascendancy of formal as against substantive rationality in human affairs. On the other hand, Hofstadter brought his friend fully to grips with the Progressive synthesis, especially in its Beardian form. When Mills taught an army specialized training course in American history—a ploy to keep his 2-A draft deferment—he therefore leaned heavily on Beard. Stressing economic conflict, he sought in a typically Progressive fashion to elicit lessons for the present from a study of the past. Such inclinations vividly inform a letter to his parents. "I am now reading up a lot on American history," Mills reported,

> in order that I may teach the army how it was with the forefathers. I find some of the forefathers rather tough old guys. And they are old enough to be very

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respectible [*sic*] now. So I am learning American history in order to quote it at the sons-of-bitches who run American big business. After all, who can deny Patrick Henry or Tommie Jefferson? . . . When I get thru they'll think american history was one big farmer-labor rally. Which in large part it damn well was.

One acknowledges the great difference in sensibilities: Mills drops a broadax where Hofstadter wields a scalpel. Yet for both men this early attraction to the same theorists marked the beginning of a long and halting journey away from the "class-conflict" framework of the Progressives toward the "status-consensus" perspective inherent in Weber's work.

A deeper affinity further united Mills and Hofstadter. This was their equal faith, apparent from the first, in the critical ideal. Both men responded most strongly to those thinkers who, while stressing the ambiguous interconnection of mind and reality, also reserved a belief in the liberating power of ideas used critically to unmask or debunk whatever was outmoded or untrue. They had written strikingly similar dissertations—Hofstadter's *Social Darwinism in American Thought* and Mills's *A Sociological Account . . . of Pragmatism*—that expressed such critical convictions. Both used the same word, "craftsmanship," as a luminous metaphor for mind—its demands, rewards, and possibilities. Both said of thought what Weber claimed of politics: that authentic intellectuals must live *for*, not *off*, ideas.

The strength of this critical conviction is what spared Mills and Hofstadter that failure of nerve so common among intellectuals of the 1940s who perceived "a more complex and terrifying world" beyond the ken of past experience. In their assessments of this violent new reality both expressed what Henry James had called "the imagination of disaster." Yet neither gave up hope. They wrote frequently for a concerned audience—the *New Republic* was a common outlet—insisting that intellect had to confront unblinkingly the ominous "age in which we live." Both displayed an optimistic tendency, persistent in all their later work, to translate problems of politics and power into intellectual terms. Trouble stemmed from faulty qualities of mind: the "religious," "metaphysical," "ossified," "sentimental," "uncritical"—these were at the root of evil. Hope therefore rested in the cultivation of opposing mental traits: the "philosophical," the "realistic," the "unsentimental," and of course the "critical." So Hofstadter admired "the cold criticism of ossified beliefs." And Mills called dramatically for a "politics of truth" that would make ideas themselves a force for change. Demanding that reason stand its ground, both affirmed the critical ideal as a central assumption of their work.

By the mid-forties, however, a revealing distinction had begun to

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assert itself. Hofstadter knew melancholy and tragedy at first hand (both his mother and his first wife died young) and he saw the darkly paradoxical aspects of existence far more clearly than Mills ever did. The historian understood and used the ideas of Freud in a way that Mills did not, and he most frequently identified the critical ideal not with rationality but with "mind"—an organic term that to some extent connotes mortality and limitation. But Mills, whose Promethean instincts knew no bounds, preferred such hard-edged words as "reason," or "rationality," or "ideas," which he used combatively like weapons to express his own vision of the critical ideal. And he always thought of society as a kind of apparatus or machine that the right-thinking craftsman of ideas could take apart and reassemble in various new ways.

This contrast in outlook prefigured major differences to come.

II

After World War II, Mills and Hofstadter found themselves together again in New York City. Mills had come to work for Paul Lazarsfeld at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, attached to Columbia University, and to pursue research under a Guggenheim Fellowship. A joint appointment at the BASR and Columbia soon followed; he was in New York to stay. Hofstadter also arrived, recently widowed and the father of a young child, to finish a book on politics and ideas under an Alfred A. Knopf Fellowship. In 1946 he too came to Columbia as an assistant professor of history. Mills predicted that "we'll be a lot together" and that the two of them might even give a joint seminar on Elites.

This transfer to a major university—one alive with new ideas, in a city that was now indisputably the nation's intellectual capital and the home of an emerging intelligentsia, the New York Intellecutals—proved vitally important to both men. Their future work showed the clear imprint of this New York–Columbia experience. Yet the imprint would be distinctive in each case, for Hofstadter and Mills responded quite differently to these new circumstances.

Hofstadter finally became *of*, not just *at*, Columbia—an insider to the university that he thought of as a "society." He also developed a certain feeling of identification with the New York community of discourse. In his writings he alluded comfortably to "us," "we," "my generation"—a habit of collective identification also discernible, for quite the same reason, in the work of Lionel Trilling, a Columbia colleague and perhaps the archetypal New York Intellectual. Ultimately the New York community, in return, claimed Hofstadter as its own. "[Richard Hofstadter] was *the* historian of 'our' generation," Daniel Bell has written, "[just] as Saul Bellow was 'our' novelist."

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It was never so with Mills. He did not really fit in at Columbia; nor did this provincial ever feel comfortable among the New York Intellectuals, whom he grew cordially to detest. His characteristic pronoun would be the singular "I," expressing a generally aggressive and far from affectionate attitude. Where Hofstadter was drawn toward the predominantly liberal New York–Columbia intelligentsia, then, Mills reacted against it and so affirmed a countervailing radical politics of his own.

The ethnic factor played a role here. Although raised as an Episcopalian (he was a choirboy), Hofstadter was half-Jewish on his father's side; this eased his entry into the mainly Jewish world of the New York Intellectuals. By contrast, Mills was a part-Irish, lapsed Catholic (and former altar boy), who felt excluded from the New York intellectual world partly on ethnic grounds. "Jewish intellectuals," Harvey Swados (himself a Jew) once remarked of his friend Mills, ". . . made him feel the outsider." In addition, such differences may help to explain the liberal historian's apparent "fear of mass action . . . of passions let loose" (Daniel Bell termed this "a fundamental Jewish fear"), as against the radical sociologist's desire for *more* passion, *more* mass action in public life. Yet this monocausal explanation must not be pressed too far. Non-ethnic factors actually account for most of Mills's and Hofstadter's differences with regard to the New York community of discourse. The historian fitted in largely because he shared the background, politics, cosmopolitan—eastern and urban—values, and literary style of the New York Intellectuals. The sociologist failed to fit in, conversely, because he was not an easterner, not a New Yorker, not a lapsed radical of the 1930s, not a man of natural literary sensibility or easy urbanity. Yet for all their personal differences, Mills and Hofstadter always shared a certain feeling of marginality—ethnic marginality included—that drew them uneasily together.

In the 1945 to 1950 period, moreover, even their political conflicts remained a bit ambiguous. For in that time of intellectual retrenchment and reorientation—a confusing interregnum between wars—its was often hard to tell just who stood where on the murky battleground of ideology. In one sense there could be no doubt that Hofstadter had moved toward the center and Mills further to the left. In 1948 the historian supported Harry Truman and the Democrats; the sociologist avowed his socialism and endorsed Norman Thomas. A debate between them over the 1948 Truman victory illustrates opposing moods. The exchange, as reported in Mills's notes, bears a revealing title: "LIBERAL PERSPECTIVES AND RADICAL FACTS." Hofstadter confesses a "tracery of happy feeling" about the Democratic triumph. But Mills pessimistically

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concludes that "now the liberal obfuscation will . . . continue for ten or more years." The historian responds critically (as Mills records it):

H: Is it an intellectual merit [*sic*] on your part to resist our tendency to be politically happy, that is to say, is it an intellectual merit or a kind of stubbornness plus not wanting to give up [y]our previous positions?

Mills sticks to his radical guns, however, and retaliates in kind. Hofstadter is too emotional and tender-minded:

M: Political analysis today involves continual self-observation as well as observation of events. You cannot have a secure self-location in a period where every movement is half-assed and not deep going into the corruption of this society of which you are sensitive. That is why you feel the desire to be politically happy with little beginnings and to see as little beginnings of big things such events [as] the Truman victory. . . . I believe that the reason for our ambiguity has to do with the uneasiness of self-location and insecurity—which make[s] us strive to be politically happy when we know in our souls that [t]his is not the answer to anything we are really interested in on the political sphere.

Radical intellectuals, the sociologist concludes, should now cultivate a negative or blasé attitude as a "safeguard of the soul."

Yet this liberal-radical division of opinion, apparent enough here, alters dramatically at the level of analysis and theory. In such terms Hofstadter could surpass Mills, as a reconsideration of the historian's brilliant work of 1948, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*, will demonstrate. At times lambasted as "consensus" or "counterprogressive" history, the book is in fact acutely critical in tone—an exposé—and retains certain categories of Progressive-Marxist scholarship. It identifies such familiar villains as the "vested interests," the "ruling class," the "unregulated profit system," the "capitalistic economy," and "imperialism"; it also alludes sympathetically to such venerable "progressive" forces as "labor," the "Negro," even "the people." In part, Hofstadter merely tries to adapt such dualistic assumptions to the context of a scary present. Thus he observes, in an unpublished portion of his introduction, that the possibility of a split between "officialdom" and "the people" is "particularly dangerous in the modern era of corporate capital, international tension, centralized communications, and skilled propaganda. Perhaps never in history has there been a more compelling need for constant critical evaluation of those who hold power. One of the best guides to such evaluation is a cold appraisal of those who have held power in the past." Such is one subversive intent of *The American Political Tradition*.

But ultimately Hofstadter performs an intellectual pirouette so daz-

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zling and light-footed that its meaning can easily be missed. For this book, relying to some extent on dualistic and material categories, finally comes to center on a more fundamental dichotomy. A clue here is the change in title from the original *Men and Ideas in American Politics* to the published *American Political Tradition*. It becomes clear that Hofstadter's tradition—the mute, organic by-product of a fiercely individualistic and capitalistic society—is what to a considerable degree has tyrannized thought and blocked change. Against this retrogressive influence, however, Hofstadter posits the potentially liberating force of ideas or philosophy that would be—again—"realistic," "systematic," "critical." Not accidentally, the two figures who come off best in the historian's treatment both have redeeming qualities of mind: Wendell Phillips, a nonpolitician and "agitator," wins praise for his "reasoned philosophy of agitation"; FDR is seen to have sensed "the failure of tradition . . . the need for novelty and daring," and, when he failed himself, to have done so because his deficient "capacity for innovation in ideas" prevented a "clearly articulated break with the inherited faith." Hofstadter constantly assumes, not only that defects of intellect lie at the root of our problems, but also that it is still possible to reason our way out of trouble by coming to grips intellectually with "what is happening in the world." Such affirmations of the critical ideal make *The American Political Tradition* exceptionally radical, for want of a better word.

Mills ought to have shouted out his praise, for he certainly agreed—down to the use of the same phrase—that the "politically relevant" intellect had to confront "what is happening in the world." Instead he complained of "bullshit" in the book and sourly told Hofstadter in front of strangers at a party that the FDR chapter reminded him "of an intellectual snot writing about a great man." Yet such criticism revealed more than spleen or envy, for at this time Mills found himself genuinely if somewhat romantically at odds with aspects of his friend's revisionism.

In the mid-forties, the sociologist had joined a group of intellectuals attached to the Inter-Union Institute of veteran labor journalist J.B.S. Hardman. The new convert rallied to the union cause with the awkward intensity, as an overly snide observer put it, of "a naïve fat boy from Texas trying to learn something about the labor movement." For a brief period Mills undeniably believed—in the fashion of the 1930s—that a unionized working class remained the last best hope for change. The faith that he later derided as "the labor metaphysic" ran rampant through his work. Indeed his 1948 essay, "Grass Roots Union with Ideas," a pietistic tribute to the Reuther brothers and the UAW, struck Hofstadter as embodying precisely the sort of "populistic" and "grass

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roots" sentimentality he would later excoriate in *The Age of Reform.* ("In my introduction . . . I want to suggest," the historian wrote in explanation of his proposed book, ". . . how significantly incongruous it is for a sophisticated sociologist writing in a sophisticated periodical to entitle an article on the UAW 'Grass Roots Union with Ideas.' ") It was also symptomatic that Mills's major work of this period, *The New Men of Power*, should have been praised by that already faithful friend of "vital center" politics, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (". . . I have not read for a long time any book which in its main bearings casts more valuable light on the tensions of American society.") For Mills, such approbation merely proved that "we can get away with it among the liberals." But Schlesinger's reaction also pointed up the basic ambivalence of a book that, while trying to unite "wobbly" emotion and "socialist" conviction in a coherent "left consensus" or "corporate liberal" theory, was at times not very much at odds with pro-union liberalism.

In fact Mills, always an elitist, had never been all that comfortable in the role of grass roots labor activist; at best he believed in union *leaders*, not the led. And, as it happened, he soon retreated to a critical perspective quite like Hofstadter's. Despite differences in emphasis and detail, the two had come by 1950 to agree on certain general presumptions: power had become concentrated and oppressive; a mass society had begun to emerge in America; extrarational factors such as status had taken on new and invidious significance in modern life. For perhaps five years, Mills and Hofstadter would press these insights in directions that, if not identical, were hardly as divergent as many have believed.

III

In the first half of the 1950s, Mills and Hofstadter advanced the revisionist assessments on which their reputations are often thought to rest. Their major works of this period illustrate the hardening of lines between two theorists of different inclinations. Yet this slow, almost arteriosclerotic, process reveals its share of surprises.

In strictly political terms, for example, Mills was not yet the intransigent radical of legend. Instead, his writings of this period make up a crazy quilt of ideological inconsistency: they express wobbly individualism, socialist collectivism, liberal pluralism, and an occasional flash of old-fashioned conservatism. Mills also found it possible in 1954 to lecture sympathetically, much as an expert might advise a client, before a group of "warlords" at the Air War College in Alabama—not your usual performance by a diehard leftist.

Nor, in some respects, was Mills even an especially political man. He defined himself in rigorously intellectual terms and, for the most part,

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avoided active involvement with great public issues of the moment. Indeed Hofstadter at times proved more outspokenly dissenting. It was not the sociologist but the historian who protested publicly and loudly when McCarthyism came home to roost at Columbia. Hofstadter spoke at meetings, signed petitions, sent at least one telegram of protest, did committee work, and—partly as a political act—wrote a book on academic freedom. But Mills, by his own admission, "didn't do anything about the witch-hunts. It was one of those things you carry as a vague worry and never convert into a problem you are going to confront." To stress such reticence, for which there were mitigating circumstances, is not to tell the whole story of Mills's opposition to McCarthyism. It is, however, to suggest the dangers of perceiving this unexpectedly complex man only in stark colors bereft of subtle hues.

In fact Hofstadter and Mills remained fairly close together on many political issues. Strongly anti-Stalinist, both still managed largely to avoid that uncritical celebration of American virtue as against totalitarian evil favored by so many intellectuals who "chose the West" in the early fifties. Both stood apart from ideologically close-knit groups. Hofstadter refused to join the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, a cold war citadel, and Mills would not lend his name to the masthead of *Dissent*—"No editorial boards for me!"—when the socialist periodical began publishing in 1954. Both also found it possible to sign a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, taken out by Columbia faculty members in 1952, endorsing Adlai Stevenson for president.

In mood and sensibility these two were still, of course, quite different: the historian moderate, exploratory; the sociologist angry, relentless. Nevertheless, to a point their theoretical work proved complementary, even interdependent. A common thread of analysis runs from *White Collar* through "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt" to *The Age of Reform*. The first, Mills's 1951 volume, is the critical response, as much literary as sociological, of a Texas outlander to the impersonal and bureaucratic conditions of New York–metropolitan modernity. *White Collar* eviscerates the city just as Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, the product of an urban mind, dissects the farm. The targets may be different, but the spirit is the same: both books are tough minded, coldly analytical, and written from vantage points outside the conditions they describe. Mills also subjects his white-collar urbanites "sweating it out in the middle of the twentieth century" to the scrutiny of the same status concept—"the status panic"—that Hofstadter later trained on agrarian radicals and Progressive reformers.

In *White Collar*, the sociologist also anticipates the status interpretation of right-wing movements that the historian would advance in

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his contribution to *The New American Right* (1955), a collaborative volume on McCarthyism. There is a difference, to be sure, in that Mills sees status as a stabilizing force of the reactionary establishment, whereas Hofstadter identifies status politics—usually but not always confined to a minority—as disruptive and anarchic. Central to both theories, however, is the animating assumption that a potentially fascist "politics of the rearguard" (Mills) or "pseudo-conservatism" (Hofstadter) derives similarly from a collective failure to contend rationally and not emotionally with harsh reality. In both cases, the reactionary politics of status are found to express unreason.

By the early 1950s, Mills and Hofstadter had both rejected the old Progressive-Marxist faith that "the people" or "the masses" were always forward-looking agencies of change. Both thought "consensus" more probable than "conflict." Both gravitated toward "elitism." Yet both retained a saving strain of democratic hope. Mills never entirely lost confidence that revelation of the facts or truth could bring once-apathetic citizens dashing forthwith to the barricades. He continued to believe that reason, widely apprehended, must necessarily transform "masses" into "publics." Hofstadter proved, as usual, more cautiously reserved. Yet the entire corpus of his work, written, like Mills's, for a large audience, aimed with dogged persistence at the advancement of public knowledge. It has been charged that Hofstadter's writing of the mid-1950s fearfully lumps populist radicalism together with right-wing McCarthyism as a dangerous mass movement opposed to order and consensus. By this reading—which has some plausibility—the historian seems conservative or antidemocratic. But in fact Hofstadter generally perceived populism, quite unlike McCarthyism, as a decently progressive movement that at times simply failed to express grievances in the most rational way. "I think [the Populists] were largely a good influence in our history," he elaborated in 1958, "just as I think the extreme right-wingers are largely bad." Mills would surely have agreed. Indeed Hofstadter had good reason to suggest that in this period he remained "left of center."

Hofstadter and Mills also converged, to an unappreciated degree, on an antagonistic view of power and elites. The jugular instinct of the sociologist is of course obvious enough. *The Power Elite* can be intellectually ambiguous at points, as I have argued elsewhere, but its tone is overwhelmingly radical. Hofstadter's more restrained criticism often persists mainly as what he himself had termed an "inarticulate major premise." Yet the critical impulse does survive. The historian possessed a hidden aggressiveness—a controlled subversive impulse—that at times broke through his public guise of ironical ambivalence. In a 1953 pro-

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posal for a study of business ideologies, written quite in the Mills spirit, he assailed the power of corporate industry to "*buy the public itself*" through "*ideological promotion*" and "opinion making under conditions of mass communication." (Original emphasis.) In the early fifties Hofstadter also accumulated notes toward a study of "elites" based on the premise, again very Mills-like, that "those who will not study, observe & *master* their elite groups will be condemned to suffer unduly from them."

But in the last analysis Mills and Hofstadter again come most closely together in the extremely intellectual nature of their criticism. They both habitually think in terms of a now familiar mental division: unreason, irrationality, anti-intellectualism, status politics, and puerile sentimentality on the one side contend against mind or reason on the other. They optimistically believe in the critical ideal as exemplified by resistant intellectuals at odds with reality. Critical thinkers must "not be altogether governed by the world," Hofstadter insists, but must preserve "their long-standing allegiance to the world of spiritual values to which they should belong." In *The Power Elite,* Mills likewise envisions that truthful intellectuals, relying on the power of negative thinking, can bring about "the presumptuous control by reason of man's fate."

In the early 1950s, much of the admitted difference between these two was still a matter of emphasis and degree. Fearing power, like Mills, Hofstadter worried most intensely about the mob passions and anti-intellectualism of a "populistic democracy." Consequently he concentrated his intellectual fire on those "totalitarian liberals" and hidebound leftists who continued, naïvely, to celebrate the "folk." Distrusting masses, like Hofstadter, Mills perceived mindless power elites as the most formidable enemy. Consequently he directed *his* most damaging salvos against those "pluralists" and "balancing boys" who failed to see the odium of power.

By the mid-1950s, however, such matters of emphasis could be vitally important. Mills and Hofstadter themselves seemed to realize that at some unmarked point earlier in the decade they had crossed paths and begun to drift apart. They moved in separate circles and saw less of one another. Each still read the other's books, but with less sympathy than before. "[M]y god it is thin stuff," Mills exclaimed of *The Age of Reform;* "nothing beyond walling and josephson and griswold on farming and if I may say so a good bit of old mills on status and all and no acknowledgements but who cares?" (Mills cared, of course.) It would not be long before Hofstadter, in an essay unique in the whole body of his work, would take on *The Power Elite* in largely hostile terms. This critque (1959) concluded on a new note, redolent of cold war presump-

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tions: ". . . if the United States were indeed 'ruled today just like Russia' [as the British edition of one Mills work proclaimed on its dust jacket] Mills would long since have become the Boris Pasternak of American social science."

These differences would soon intensify.

IV

Around 1957 or 1958, it may be argued, American intellectuals began to move from the consensus of the fifties to the protest of the sixties. In this period Mills assumed the role of pamphleteer and agitator, speaking loudly to the conscience of the times. The collapse of his marriage in 1957 partially explains this heightened zeal; private anguish added to his public outrage. But beyond this, in 1956 and 1957 Mills had also fallen in with two groups of radical intellectuals—the early British new leftists and the courageous revisionists of Poland. These political contacts further nourished his resolve to take on issues of pressing import, most notably the growing threat of world war. In 1958 Mills charged madly into battle.

Throughout the year he crisscrossed the country, attacking American foreign policy and calling boldly for resistance. The assault produced his "Pagan Sermon to the Christian Clergy" and three Sidney Hillman Lectures on "War and Peace" that struck the audience—so one eyewitness said—like a "bombshell." In the fall Mills capped this campaign by publishing the most polemical tract he had yet written, *The Causes of World War Three*, a book-length pamphlet described by the author as "a blast, a sermon, a warning, a demand, a squeal. . . ." The book argued bold points: that the United States bore major responsibility for the drift toward war; that the concentration of power, seen rather pessimistically in *The Power Elite*, had now become "a cheering condition" because it "opened the way to a greater role for reason in human affairs." But *World War Three* was most strikingly distinguished by its split personality. Constructive and programmatic to some extent, the book nevertheless came to stress the utopian presumption that intellectuals, wielding truth like a sword, could themselves bring about change. "This is a time," Mills declared, ". . . when the power of the intellectual has become potentially very great indeed . . . there is much evidence that political ideas could now become crucial." His was a *Communist Manifesto* (the revised edition) that centered almost wholly on the mind. "As intellectuals of the world," Mills trumpeted, as if he were the Karl Marx of the thinking class, "we should awake and unite with intellectuals everywhere."

This strangely divided book provoked Hofstadter to an ambivalence

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of his own. Writing from England in late 1958, he praised its moral evocation of the critical ideal. "I quite agree with what I suppose to be the working assumption of yr hortatory mood," he assured Mills, "which is that mere pessimism will get us nowhere, and that the human will has got to be fed on other food." As political analysis, however, the work left him stone-cold and hostile. "Yr present book," he observed,

> is really a book about morals, not abt politics. I am moved by yr moral awareness, sometimes deeply moved. But I am not impressed by yr political intelligence, which is in fact not much in evidence here. I.e., almost no actual pol. decisions are analyzed, . . . and only a handful are actually referred to. There is much ruthless & effective analysis of conventional thinking (very good, too), but little programmatic stuff about politics. How do "we" prevent the elite from doing anything it wishes? . . . tho I feel you have some grand moments as a moralist, and have written, in this vein, a useful book, I think you are not as much of a political man as you think you are. Indeed, I suspect you of *having* no politics, though you say many astute things *about* politics & pol. thinking.

The point is doubly revealing. Hofstadter was right to say that Mills, always criticizing better than he prescribed, viewed politics through utopian eyes from outside the system. But the criticism also showed that the historian himself had changed a great deal. Only ten years before, he had found it possible to defend another hot-blooded and somewhat Mills-like critic, Wendell Phillips, as a "crisis thinker" and "agitator." So Mills had a point, too, when he charged privately that "Dick—who's been in 'the conservative mood' . . . does not know that [in *The Causes of World War Three*] I am addressing *him*—or his type."

This political division of opinion widened considerably over the next few years. Never as radically extreme as some thought, Mills nevertheless allied himself with a new left and against the *status quo*. Hofstadter himself was no crude or party-line liberal. "Mencken was right," he had blurted out upon the presidential nomination of John F. Kennedy in 1960, "we are a nation of boobs. . . . We're a nation of boobs." But finally he did cast his lot, ambiguously, with two-party politics and the going system. The historian now appeared to Mills as an "establishment type," a friend of such enemy liberals as Daniel Bell, a contributor to *Encounter* (a journal Mills detested) and so linked by association to a group the sociologist called "these smidges around the [Congress] for Cultural Freedom, this whole Nato intellectuals crowd." Hofstadter thought, on the other hand, that Mills had become alarmingly negative and anti-American. The two parted company explicitly over *Listen, Yankee*, the pro-Castro tract that Mills, writing in the first person as a Cuban revolutionary, had produced in 1960.

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In his last tormented months, Mills went so far as to reject American politics and policy—in which Hofstadter still tenuously believed—as rankly fascist. The historian also launched new assaults, ferocious enough for him, on the extreme danger in politics of the "utopian mind . . . of the right or the left"—an assault almost certainly aimed at Mills as well as others. And Hofstadter's well-known essay "A Note on Intellect and Power," supposedly concerned with historian Loren Baritz, may in fact be read as another attack on Mills as an "apocalyptic prophet" given to strident denunciation of all opponents as "prostitutes" and "traitors." (Mills was quite fond of both terms.) In this final friends-or-enemies antagonism, one detects the future history of the 1960s writ small: ideological division, hostility and recrimination, lost possibilities.

It is especially important to stress, therefore, that the frayed thread of connection remained somehow intact. This is apparent in the similarity between two pivotal books of this last period, Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) and Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963). One must first concede a difference. Hofstadter's concern is the anti-intellectualism deriving from a populistic and democratic culture. His rather conservative defense of the mind produces kind words for, of all people, Theodore Roosevelt—a man whose greatest sin, the historian had once written, was to teach grown men to think like boy scouts. By contrast, Mills's primary target is what Christopher Lasch has called "the anti-intellectualism of the intellectuals." He relentlessly assails those thinkers who, by reason of cowardice or stupidity, do not advance the radical "politics of truth" that can alone stave off disaster.

Underlying this disagreement, however, a common faith persists. Both *The Sociological Imagination* and *Anti-Intellectualism* are deeply personal books that convey, in evocative fashion, what it means to live the life of the mind fully and without compromise. Both books are filled with passion; both affirm the possibilities, as Mills puts it, "of mind, of study, of intellect, of reason, of ideas"; both express the critical ideal. (Not incidentally, both also owe a major debt to Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination.*)

And, despite everything, Hofstadter cared enough to acknowledge this shared belief—at least to himself. For in *Anti-Intellectualism* he selects the final section of *The Sociological Imagination,* an appendix "On Intellectual Craftsmanship" that Mills had originally written in 1952, to exemplify the "piety" of intellect in its right state. "Some years ago," Hofstadter relates,

> a colleague asked me to read a brief essay he had written for students going on to do advanced work in his field. Its ostensible purpose was to show how the life

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of the mind could be cultivated within the framework of his own discipline, but its effect was to give an intensely personal expression to his dedication to intellectual work. Although it was written by a corrosively skeptical mind, I felt that I was reading a piece of devotional literature in some ways comparable to Richard Steele's *The Tradesman's Calling* or Cotton Mather's *Essays to Do Good*, for in it the intellectual task had been conceived as a *calling*, much in the fashion of the old Protestant writers. His work was undertaken as a kind of devotional exercise, a personal discipline, and to think of it in this fashion was possible because it was more than merely workmanlike and professional: it was work at thinking, work done supposedly in the service of truth. The intellectual life has here taken on a kind of primary moral significance. It is this aspect of the intellectual's feeling about ideas that I call his piety. The intellectual is *engagé*—he is pledged, committed, enlisted. What everyone else is willing to admit, namely that ideas and abstractions are of signal importance in human life, he imperatively feels.

This moving tribute provides an epitaph of sorts. It confirms that Richard Hofstadter and C. Wright Mills—men who often fought like two unyielding bulldogs—were also kindred spirits to the end.

Rural Route

KATE JENNINGS

The sunset's afterglow slants over the maples,
gilding stiffened grasses and stricken zinnias
and frozen purple pokeweed berries.

The chill deepens at dusk.
Leaves scuffle with a dry scrabble.
Underfoot the leaf-strewn path crackles.

Now the fox dines by moonlight on rabbits and mice,
relishing the fine-boned snap between his teeth,
moving his jaws dreamily over tender furred flesh.

KATE JENNINGS's poem "Place Names," which was published in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, will be included in the 1977 Borestone Mountain anthology.

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Night's La Brea

Richard Kenney

1 Early

It is very early now, no light yet, nor
sensation, apart from simple motions of waking:
discomfort in the chill air, the stiff walk
quick across cold floorboards, razor
brushed lather and warm tap water off
my cheeks; the feel of bare wool on my wrists
and throat . . . the hiss of the stove, and white coffee.
Alone in this house, I wonder if *tabula rasa*
ever existed at all. Lake Champlain looks flat,
black by starlight, even the sheaved winds
are flat as feathers on a sleeping raven's wing . . . .
Later, forecast rains will toss down Smuggler's Notch
in silver skirtveils, hiss across the flatiron
lake like drops on a woodstove . . . into the night

2 Tranquility

and hideous broomflaps, the unfolding condors
knuckled to a vague bed-rail, and hung doorjamb
anthropoid with clothes . . . in this appalling
light even physical objects fail, conform
to memories and night's La Brea, the glossy oil pools . . . .
By breakfast all grotesques have quit their roaring,
pawing at the sky for light and release, followed
their immense tracks down sinkholes of their own
muddling until the only evidence
of dreams is gone, erratic halos ravens
figured, just askim the water, rings, rings—
and love, your slender unstockinged feet scarcely
and always rough the nap of a new-swept carpet
still, and this is not tranquility, not yet—

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Album of a Play Doctor

STANLEY KAUFFMANN

I

In 1945 I thought I was a novelist. For ten years, until 1941, I had thought I was a theater man, a member of a repertory company for life, working as one contributor to the production of great plays. That had collapsed. Then for a couple of years I had worked at various magazine jobs to support myself while I wrote novels. Luck with my second novel had allowed me to quit magazine work and to concentrate on writing—novels, mostly. I was hoping to make a long circle back to the theater in some way. Then I suddenly cut across that circle on a short axis.

Claude Leland, who had been in that ten-year theater company with me and had subsequently become a dialogue director in Hollywood, came back to New York to work on a Broadway production. He was assisting Michael Brimmer, a film director in his thirties who wanted to have a hit on Broadway. In those days many Hollywood figures wanted Broadway hits, for their egos as much as their careers, to prove that they weren't mere film people. Michael had signed to direct a play and had brought Claude, who had worked with him on a film. Apparently Michael's theory was that, since he had never directed in the theater, he ought to be prepared for a few tiny problems with which he had no experience. Claude could brief him on them.

Claude called me when he got to New York, and I saw him several times. I was invited to an early rehearsal of the play and met Michael. Then the play opened a pre-Broadway tour in New Haven, and, after four days, it moved to Boston for a couple of scheduled weeks. The night it opened in New Haven it was in trouble. The day after the Boston opening, Claude telephoned me and asked whether I could possibly help in the rewriting. I had never done anything like that, but Claude knew me, knew my work, and had recommended me. "They" had asked him to telephone. I never learned how many others they had called before they got to me, but I didn't care. The idea of the enterprise, more than the specifics—being called in to rescue a play on the road, to join in the romance of high-powered show business—was too glittery to resist. I had seen the play, called *Heritage of Glory*, and knew it was no better than its title. Still, it would have to have been a lot worse than it was before I would have let it shut me out of this adventure. I told Claude I would come up to Boston and see.

In fact, this was not my first brush with big-time show business. While I had been working on magazines, in an office in a tall Broadway building, another friend of mine who had also been a member of that ten-year company was rehearsing in a revue just around the corner. He used to drop in from time to time during rehearsal breaks, and one day he told me that his show needed sketches. I wrote one that night. The director read it the next day and put it in rehearsal. I wrote another sketch that night. The director put it in rehearsal. The day of the dress rehearsal I asked for a contract. The director decided that the show was running long and cut my sketches. The morning after the opening most of the reviews said that the show needed more sketches. But I didn't regret the experience; I was glad of it for a secret reason. Everything about the revue had been the opposite of what I had devoted myself to for ten years; everything about it had given me some of the tingling sensation of sin.

Now again there was excitement, some-

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what wicked—even desperate—because this was not the theater I had wanted to work in, but, in a perverse way, all the more tingling because of that.

Claude was waiting for me at the Ritz Hotel in Boston. He was a tall, big-nosed, addictedly enthusiastic man with a gassy voice, warm in a puppylike way and about as reliable as a puppy. He told me as we walked across the Common to the theater that the show was not really in such terrible shape but that the script needed a fresh eye. He and Michael had read my latest novel in California and thought that I was just the man. I couldn't see a connection between my book and this play, but I was careful not to say so. The play had ten more days in Boston before it opened in New York. I would have plenty of time to get the script in shape, said Claude, and it might turn out to be just the break I needed. He knew I wanted to get back into the theater.

In the lobby we met Michael, who embraced me. He was a big, heavyset man with an undershot jaw, full of vigor and quick decisions and bad judgment. (But the bad judgments were all theatrical: he became a successful producer of cheap films.) He wore a flapping, seedy topcoat indoors and out, coughed frequently, and carried in one of his topcoat pockets a bottle of cough medicine from which he frequently swigged.

"Great," said Michael as he released me. "Fabulous. I know you can do it, fella. I have great respect for your integrity"—I had already learned that "integrity" was the show-business term for someone who wouldn't do absolutely anything for money—"and I know you can really get to the guts of this thing, to the truth. We're going to knit it up and sock it in, fella."

It was curtain time. I went in and saw the play again. It was about the thirty-year-old son of a famous general. The general, who was meant to suggest MacArthur, had died on Bataan; the son, after competent but undistinguished war service, was back in civilian life trying to cope with the public's memory of his father and with his wife's and little son's hero worship of the old man. The leading role was played by Paddy Quinn, who had been a familiar face in pictures, never a star, during the 1930s and who had been in the theater before and after. He was a bit old for the part, but he was still good-looking and very appealing.

I watched the show and made mental notes. The script was worse than I had remembered. This made me feel fine. I saw, as the thing progressed, how I would slash, rewrite, insert. The work would have been harder on a better play. The show went by like a patient on a stretcher, and I was the surgeon who would operate. The worse the case, the more I would shine.

Later that night there was a meeting in Bernie Manheim's suite at the Ritz. Bernie was the producer. He was also a sailor in the U.S. Navy. It was now only a few months after the war's end, and Bernie had not yet been discharged. He had enlisted in the navy three years before because he had connections and could get himself stationed at Church Street in New York with light duty.

Bernie was a thug. He looked it, too. He had a bull chest, a flat nose, a truculent mouth, and he walked with his hands usually clenched in fists. His voice and his speech were an assault. The paradox of his face was in his gray eyes, which were beautiful. I had heard stories from Claude and others, often told with a proud grin, that Bernie had been a top mobster in the wholesale produce markets and was very rich, that he had been in various troubles with the police and once had narrowly escaped a murder charge. True or not, the stories didn't strain belief.

Bernie had arrived at the Ritz while I was at the performance. His pea jacket and sailor hat were on the sofa next to him. He and I had met before, and he shook hands with scowling seriousness. Zack Someroff, the business manager of the production, was with him. Zack was a sweet-faced, dimpled man, witty, formerly handsome, now fat with compulsive eating. Bernie ordered sandwiches, to go with the drinks already in the room, and Zack ate most of the food, chuckling and shrugging as he attacked each fresh sandwich.

We talked generally for a little while, with Claude hovering on the outside of the circle supplying an "ooh" or an "aah" whenever I said anything. Bernie was impressed with me, not because he had read either of my novels but because he had seen my name on the jackets. Zack was on my side because he liked me—we, too, had met before—and because I

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reminded him of a cousin of his who was a successful playwright-director. Anyway Zack was willing to try anything, more out of indifference than pressure. Although he did his job excellently, he didn't give much of a damn about the show. He was getting paid very well, and he knew the whole thing was a tax write-off for Bernie.

Very soon Bernie said, "OK, let's cut the ——— already." He said to me, "The thing, the whole thing, is do you think you can improve this ——— show?"

I said, "Bernie, a child of five could improve it. I can improve it about 200 percent, I guess, at a minimum, but I'm not sure that then it will really be any good."

Zack chuckled in his disarming way, as if this scene, like all of his life, were being performed for his amusement.

"If you made it too good," he said, "you'd only upset Bernie's accountants. Just make it good enough to bring in." To New York, of course. "So we don't look like total slobs. What you saw tonight we just can't bring in."

"How much time do we have?" I asked.

Michael decided it was time to make his presence felt. "Not much. But I've been working out a rehearsal schedule—"

"Wait a minute," said Bernie, "what's not much?" To me he said, "I already discussed with Zack. We'll close Saturday here. We'll save here a week. Tomorrow Zack calls Marvin." Marvin was the manager of the Broadway house they had booked. "We'll see whether we can put off for a week the opening, at half rent. That ——— owes me a favor. I got him that redheaded usher. He owes me one."

Zack smiled benignly at me. "Now you're in show business."

"Not quite yet," I said. "That would give me a week to do the revision. Then you'd have only a week to rehearse it."

Michael said, "You can feed me the new stuff next week while you're doing it. I can work with the cast while you're finishing."

Zack said, "I'll get you a room in Mike's hotel in New York. You live at home, if you want, but you work in the room down the hall from Mike."

It was moving fast, it was whirling around me, I was the center. I loved it. I felt I had been born for that moment.

"What about the author?" I asked. "Does he agree about my stepping in like this?"

Bernie snarled between his teeth. "That stupid ———. I sent that stupid ——— back to New York. Tomorrow I send him home to Chicago. He opens his ——— mouth, I'll tear off his ——— and shove it down his ——— throat."

Zack looked at me sweetly. "OK?"

I laughed. "I'd still like to have something on paper, something the author signs."

Michael agreed gravely. "He should have it, Bernie. He should be protected."

Impatiently, Bernie said, "Zack, you'll get?"

"I'll draw up something in the morning and send it to his agent. It'll be easy. He doesn't sign, we close for good. Our way, he saves something."

Bernie turned to me like a bulldog ready to bite. "Well?"

"All right," I said, announcing a decision I had made the moment Claude had telephoned me in New York. "I'll do it."

Michael coughed happily and swigged at the medicine he took from his topcoat pocket. "Fabulous," he wheezed. Behind him Claude glowed.

Zack—who had known all along, I thought, that I would agree—said, "Bernie, Stanley's going to need a little money to go on, pocket money."

Obviously when someone asked Bernie for money, his first instinct was to fight. But he quickly saw the justice of this request, and the scowl cleared. "OK. So how much?"

"A hundred," said Zack.

"What?" snarled Bernie.

"You heard me," said Zack, "fifty dollars." He glanced at me and smiled as if to say "I tried."

Bernie grunted and pulled up his navy blouse. Tucked into the waistband of his tight trousers were his wallet and his checkbook. "I'll give a check."

The sailor with the thick neck bent over the end table next to his chair and, under the lamplight, scribbled me into the Broadway theater.

II

I floated. For the next few days in Boston, for the next two weeks in New York, I was lofted beyond the tugs of circumstance. I felt that I had sailed into my sphere, that my pre-

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destined life had been realized.

The members of the cast welcomed me with hardly a grumble. Partly this was because they knew they were in trouble and help of some kind was needed. Partly it was because Claude had propagandized for me, partly because Zack told them I reminded him of his famous cousin when young, partly because Michael had a rapidly swelling sense of incompetence and wanted to get out from under a looming disaster by building me up as competent, therefore responsible. And partly it was because from the very beginning I did things to the script that showed a grip.

The only one who disliked me was an ancient actress named Florence Forbes—I had books at home with pictures of her as an ingenue in the 1890s—who played the hero's mother, widow of the great general. I disliked her first. She looked like the hero's grandmother, and she played the role with every cliché she could remember and many she didn't have to think of because they were second nature to her. She was an old theater animal and must have scented my dislike of her under my restraint. Her dislike worked itself out by affecting her memory for new lines, which, before my coming, she had handled well. The last night in Boston she took her little grandson on her lap, intending to console him with my new line, "Things look gloomy now, darling, but don't worry, it's all passing." What she said was, "Things look gloomy now, darling, but don't worry, it's all permanent."

And the two lady furniture-movers were aloof. They had a brief scene that had been written in to get a few laughs out of the wartime manpower shortage. The scene wasn't funny and would have stuck out as padding even if it had been funny. One of the first things I told Michael and Zack was that I was going to cut the scene. I told them confidentially, but the two actresses caught the whiff in the air and looked upon me as a hired assassin.

Otherwise it was creamy. Paddy, a lean-faced Irish-American, full of twinkling-eyed deployable charm, took to me at once; and I, who had watched him from movie balconies in my high school days, was entranced. Even the boy who played his son, Dennis Feeney, a freckle-faced kid who was a freckle-faced kid in lots of magazine ads, liked me somewhat—the first time that a child had responded reasonably well to me. I thought it was because I was just getting old enough—close to thirty—to be interested in a child as a child. The feeling had doubtless been delayed in me because I had no children of my own.

By the time we were all on the train coming down from Boston we were full of the elation of triumphant return, although we all knew we were facing a week's pause while I finished rewriting the script. Marvin, the Broadway theater manager, had agreed to a week's postponement of the opening so that they would have some time to rehearse the new script. That railroad car was suffused with the Spirit of the Second Chance.

Somewhere south of Providence, while Paddy was doubling me up with sly inside stories about Hollywood figures he had known, Zack came down the aisle and waved his hand at me, a hand just as plump and dimpled as his face. "Can I wangle you away from that drunken Irish con man for a minute?" Paddy, holding bottle and paper cup, said with cartoon booziness, "Watch out who you're calling Irish." I laughed, convinced that at last I knew the meaning of the phrase "best of all possible worlds," and went with Zack.

In a compartment were Bernie and Michael and some glasses. We all had drinks and came quickly to a point. They didn't want me to make any plans for the week after the week in which I finished rewriting the play. They wanted me to be around to comment and observe and polish when they went back into rehearsal, and they would pay me for my time. I asked Michael whether he would mind, and he said, "Hell, fella, I'm the one who suggested it." Bankruptcy, I thought, as generosity. "You've got ideas," said Michael. "We want you to stick around and keep on being creative. Besides, you get a production credit, and you can use that, right?"

I said I was grateful, but within myself I was only patient. This was my realm; they were all courtiers.

What I remember most clearly about the week of rewriting are the praise and the club sandwiches. I can't remember the actual writing. The pages spun through the machine—better, certainly, than they had been. I had lunch in the room every day, a club sandwich. I handed clumps of sheets every day to Mi-

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chael and Zack—Sailor Bernie kept away—and Michael kept shaking his head in tight-lipped Hollywood awe and Zack just kept dimpling. I went home at night, tired but almost too happy to sleep, anxious to get back to the hotel room next morning and write some more and get some more praise.

I never had an easier week. Some twenty-five people were waiting for me, a Broadway theater was waiting for me, and all I felt was carefree. My ten years in the repertory company had prepared me for all this, in a way, by setting me above it. I would pass through this success, tolerant of those to whom it meant everything, to another side, to more.

I finished the rewriting about noon on Saturday, and the last clump of pages was duplicated that afternoon. Early that evening there was a meeting in Zack's office, up an archaic elevator in a fusty building on a street off Broadway. There was Bernie, sitting behind a desk in his sailor suit, looking like a Goth who had conquered the city. Zack was in a chair near him. Michael and Claude sat on a dying sofa, Michael in his topcoat coughing sagely, Claude glowing, his very clasped hands glowing.

Zack, though not behind the desk, was chairman as usual. He said to me, sweetly quiet, "You honestly did a fabulous job."

"Fabulous, fella," said Michael.

"Just what we expected," said Zack. He smiled and shrugged. "Well, what we know now we expected. Anyway, we think the show stands a chance now—not just not to get murdered but maybe to stick around a couple of months. But we all think it needs a fresh viewpoint. The production, I mean. And we think you should take over as director. Bernie agrees, Mike agrees."

Bernie nodded sullenly, which merely meant that he didn't really know what he was nodding about and was as usual being guided by Zack. Michael said, "We have confidence in you. And I'm going to be standing by. You can count on me."

Silently I flung an obscene reply at him. "Thank you, Mike," I said.

"Now you're thinking about program credit," said Zack. I wasn't but I would have been, and I was glad he had mentioned it. "By contract Mike is director, but a good prominent production-assist credit for you."

"Fine."

"And I've got an agreement I'll send on Monday to your agent," said Zack. "Covers the rewriting, the redirecting."

"Fine," I said, knowing that I would have gone ahead, as I had been working, without a contract. "What about the cast? What about Florence? I don't think she cares for me."

Michael said, "We've got a surprise for you. We gave Florence her notice and we sent some of your pages to Rose Mackaye. She likes it. She starts Monday." Rose Mackaye! One of the best elderly actresses in New York, a woman I had loved ever since I had been going to the theater. I said so.

"Then we're off and running," said Zack. He smiled with dimpled caution. "Well, anyway, off. The cast gets the rest of the new script tonight, Monday we begin. We've got a week. Alleyga*zam*."

"I think we can do it," I said. "At least they know the characters, they know the set, and so on. If they cooperate, I think we can do it."

"If they don't," said Bernie, "I will personally tear off their ——— and ——— and shove 'em down their ——— throats."

So at ten o'clock on Monday morning I went into the Commodore Theater as the director.

III

It smelled good. There were two smells, in fact: the high mustiness backstage and the damp hushed lake smell of the front of the house when empty. I had never felt more at home in my life than the morning I walked in there, never less wary of any work I was starting.

The company was mine. They had read the new script, knew it was much better, and had already learned most of it. They had done some reading on the earlier parts during the past week with Michael, but, as Paddy told me, without much reliance on his direction. During that week I had seen a few of them over dinner, like Paddy, and we had got on well. Now they looked at me as if I were the doctor who had fought his way through the blizzard with the serum.

Every minute, every hour increased my confidence and theirs in me. I had directed before, in various places, and now, as before, I modeled my behavior as well as my methods on the director of the company I had

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been in for ten years. I hated him for the dissolution of the company, but I knew how good a director he was in many ways, and I had a species of revenge by using what I had learned from him here in a theater he had despised. So for the first day or so I put a chair for myself on stage in front of the footlights and sat there speaking quietly to the actors as we worked out new patterns of movement, new integrations of relationship, taking an actor aside if there were major points to be made so as not to embarrass him. I knew I was a better director than my model, more evocative, less imposing. I could see it working on the actors.

Claude, when he wasn't running errands or helping otherwise, sat in the front row of the orchestra, wide-eyed, yessing me even when he was silent. Zack dimpled at me and in the lunch breaks tried almost frantically to be funny but was hampered by his respect. Michael dropped in from time to time during the week, sitting in the back of the house, nodding approvingly when I passed as if, by remote control, he was operating through me. Bernie blushed when we met in the wings, unused to being pleasant and satisfied. Rose Mackaye, the lovely old actress who was now the grandmother, wrote me a note—I got it at home five days after rehearsals started—telling me how much she thought of me. Paddy addressed me in Yiddish terms of endearment, phrases he had picked up in Hollywood.

Only little Dennis Feeney, the grandson, was impervious. Obedient but impervious. Nothing bothered or impressed him. He had the notorious *sangfroid* of the professional child that drives mature actors mad—no trace of stage fright, instant memory of his lines, of everyone's lines. Dennis was never flustered and was always, unembarrassedly, phony. He was a photographer's model, and he could make any kind of face that was asked for. This was the first acting he had ever done, and he just kept on making faces.

The only human thing I knew about this little manufacturer of barefoot-boy appeal was that when Zack had taken him and his mother and his agent to lunch at a good restaurant, to settle Dennis's contract, the boy was invited to order what he liked from the grand menu and he had asked for a cream-cheese-and-jelly sandwich. I clung to that story as a ray of hope in the moments when he was obeying me impenetrably.

While the set was being installed and touched up at the Commodore, while the lights were being hung, we had to rehearse elsewhere. Zack got us a theater down on Second Avenue, in those days a Yiddish theater, that was available between shows. The fact that we were going down there for a few days couldn't have suited Paddy better. At the first rehearsal on that stage he came out with his hat on, beating his breast with his fist, nodding his head, and played his first scene with a sour-cream accent, while the rest of us rolled with laughter.

It was an immense theater, used mostly for musicals, and there was a wide orchestra pit full of battered music stands and chairs. One morning we rehearsed Dennis's big emotional scene, in the course of which he went from Face and Voice A to Face and Voice B and so on, all patently prepared in front of the mirror and his mother. I watched from the middle of the house, wondering how I could crack through that juvenile glacier. I thought of the cream cheese and jelly. After the scene I came down the aisle to the orchestra rail and called him to the footlights. Speaking across the orchestra pit, I explained quietly, while he listened with complete attention, that we didn't want him to "show" us anything, we just wanted him to understand what this other little boy was feeling and the rest would follow, that we knew he could do it because this other little boy was very much like himself and probably liked the same kinds of sandwiches, and so on. He listened unwaveringly. I finished and asked him whether he agreed. "Yes, Mr. Kauffmann," he said soberly, then continued without a breath, "Mr. Kauffmann, do you think this pit is about eight feet wide?"

The set was ready at the Commodore; we went back uptown. Euphoria reigned. Everyone knew, which was true, that the show was getting better and better. "*King Lear* it ain't," said Paddy. "Maybe not even *The Cherry Pickers*. But at least now the curtain goes up and down right, and we don't bump into each other." He thought it was better than that. So did the others.

Euphoria then took the form of a small celebration for Bernie. He had given the cast a week's layoff at full salary while I rewrote the

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play and another week at full salary while we rehearsed. We all knew it was a tax loss for him, but it was a tax loss that had helped us. We all chipped in to buy him a gift, which we presented to him after the first dress rehearsal. We gathered on stage, and after a few minutes Zack brought Bernie in, flushed and disconcerted. Later I learned that Bernie wasn't flushed with modesty: Zack had found him busy with the redheaded usher in the ushers' dressing closet.

"Bernie," said Zack, dimpling, as we gathered around the chunky sailor, "at first we thought we'd get you something for your money, but we couldn't find a big enough trunk." Laughter. Bernie ducked his head, trying to behave the way he thought people ought to behave when they were being amiably kidded. Then Zack gave him a nicely wrapped present—some ties for civilian life—and we all applauded and Bernie tried to thank us without using profanity.

As the little celebration was breaking up, Michael slipped an envelope into my hand, with a look of friendship on his lantern-jawed, vulpine face that would have done little Dennis proud. When I got off by myself, I opened the envelope and found a three-page handwritten letter on Michael's hotel stationery. It began: "Dear Stan, Three weeks ago I made a friend." It wound on and on through its explicit praise and its implicit self-protection. Michael's name was on the program as director; mine was merely noted with thanks for my assistance. Michael was signaling that, in case the show was a hit or at least got some favorable publicity, he wanted me as partner, not insurrectionist. Yet the letter was so neatly phrased that he had no future obligation to me if things went badly. It was well done.

That first dress rehearsal had gone smoothly. The second dress rehearsal went better. The audience was enthusiastic—not a full preview audience, just a couple of dozen people whom Zack had rounded up somewhere. Every laugh line got a laugh, every curtain brought applause. The air hummed backstage.

Then we opened.

IV

Early the next morning I went out for some breakfast groceries. I felt that the few people in the street had read the reviews and were staring at me. Later I went out to get some things for lunch. I felt that the many people in the street were staring at me. When I went up to the theater that evening I thought that the crowds on Broadway were turning their backs on me and were looking at me over their shoulders.

In the theater itself the stagehands were consoling, the company sore but plucky. Rose Mackaye kissed me and gave me a flower for my buttonhole that she had brought from her window box at home. Michael and Claude didn't come around until the next day. Michael looked like a captain who had given a lieutenant a chance that had been bobbled. "That's the army, lad," his look seemed to say. "Shape up or ship out." Claude seemed to keep himself behind Michael at all times, looking over Michael's shoulder at me in sorrowful moist-eyed agreement. Bernie had disappeared. He had disappeared about halfway through the party after the opening at the luxe Central Park West apartment of a business friend of his, a partial backer of the show. When the reviews started to come in, Bernie had begun to get sloppily drunk. His wife, a birdy dyed blonde, had dragged the heavy sailor away. I never saw him again.

The reviews had been characteristically incompetent to discern the good elements in the show, like some of the performances, but in sum they were not unjust. They could not have been just to me because they could not take into account the script and the staging with which I started. How often I and the others had told ourselves not to see the improvements disproportionately. How little effect our own warnings had had on us.

Still, one review infuriated me. It gave me a point to fume righteously about while everything else collapsed. I asked Zack whether we should write to the editor of the *Evening Blade*. The *Blade*'s critic had arrived somewhat drunk and had panned the show like all the rest of the press, but he had added that the worst scene was the one with the lady furniture-movers—the scene that had been cut out in Boston. This critic had evidently read the out-of-town reviews, which had singled out that scene for dispraise, and then had dozed through opening night. It was blatant dereliction, I said, and I thought it ought to be charged.

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"Forget it," said Zack gently. "He's always drunk. It's a blessing if you've got a hit because he just rewrites other people's raves. The rest of the time you take your chances."

"But should we let him get away with this?"

"We can't win anything," said Zack. "We'll only look like soreheads. Suppose we prove our point. How's it going to help us?" He was pragmatically right; but his "we," I thought, excluded me. He was thinking of his own future shows. He dimpled a smile at me. "Of course we could always get Bernie to go over to his office and tear off his ——— and shove it down his ——— throat."

The play closed on Saturday night after five performances. Only after it closed did I realize that the author, so far as I knew, had not been at any of those performances. He had gone back to Chicago after Bernie had given him an ultimatum.

The Monday after the closing, Michael and Claude went back to California. Michael called me from his hotel just before he left and said he was short of cash. Could I meet him at Grand Central—in those days the chic route was the Twentieth Century Limited and the Santa Fe Chief—and lend him a hundred and ten dollars? He would mail me a check as soon as he got home. I didn't ask the reason for the odd figure, and he didn't tell me. I felt some kind of bruised loyalty and I happened to have the money, so I got it out of the bank and went up to the station. He and Claude bade me farewell as if we were all campaigners who had been together on St. Crispin's Day and shared a secret that others would never understand.

Zack kept in touch. He said he would try to get me more directing work, possibly through his cousin. I knew that he understood my feeling about myself and, at least to some degree, shared it—the feeling during rehearsals that I was a king in his kingdom. "A little bit of leverage," said Zack later on, "it's happened for worse shows, and you'd have had a foot in the door." He kept his word and did try for a while to help me, but the world piled up on him, and he didn't have much to go on in my case. He waddled smilingly out of my life. He died about ten years later of, I heard, overeating.

Dennis Feeney went into films, made two, and failed. The era of child stars was ending; besides, the camera magnified his cue-card face making.

Paddy and I remained friends for about four years, and through him I met a number of film actors—some of them from silent films, some of them ex-stars—who formed a small freemasonry in New York. Being with them was like being belatedly behind the scenes in matters that had been important to me when I was ten and fifteen. But we parted. Paddy and his friends were either politically conservative or politically null, and although I was not a radical, I seemed so to them. They dropped me, almost with a screech, as the heyday of Joe McCarthy dawned.

Bernie produced two successful musicals in the next decade and a few failures. Then he went into other tangential business and, with the aid of a public relations firm, tried to make himself into an avuncular New York figure. I never got a penny from him for all the work I did, other than the first fifty dollars in Boston.

Michael went on to his millionaire success as a producer of exploitation films. He never sent back the hundred and ten.

Claude rang me up some years later when he came to New York, but the sound of his voice reminded me of those sad eyes looking over Michael's shoulder and I invented some reason not to see him.

As for me, I was haunted by the idea of poetic justice, as if I had been punished for straying from the kind of theater to which I had once devoted myself. In one way I disliked the idea because it was possibly priggish, but mostly I was proud of it because I had really known such a devotion; and it could now mark me out for such a high idea as poetic justice.

Proud or not, right or not, I was homeless again. I had to find another country in which to be a citizen, let alone a king.

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Beckett Without Angst

JOHN ROMANO

. . . life without tears, as it is wept.
—Beckett, *Molloy*

The first step, if one wants to bring the achievement of Samuel Beckett into focus, is to recognize his terrible will to please. It is not easy, because approaches to his work are watched over by dark-minded critics with vested interests in a Beckett who is the reverse of pleasure giving, a painful and offensive Beckett, the singer of the abyss. Café existentialists pounced upon Beckett's work at an early moment—in the mid-1950s, when the first productions of *Waiting for Godot* excited retrospective interest in the strange fiction he had written in the 1940s: *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*. As a result, talk about Samuel Beckett became almost inextricably linked with talk about "the void," replete with allusions to Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Since then some critics have dissented from the view that this is the proper context for understanding Beckett—and they have been joined by some directors, who have a professional stake, after all, in the pleasures Beckett might afford. But in general the terms upon which the public is asked to take Beckett were set twenty years ago in a horrific extremity of the culture's self-image. The Swedish Academy, awarding Beckett a Nobel Prize in 1969, brought controversy upon itself by breaking faith with those terms. The academy spoke of Beckett's "love of mankind" and of his work as a "miserere" offering "comfort to those in need"; whereas Beckett had been chiefly known for his crisp contempt for the human condition and for his apparent desire to disturb and offend his readers rather than comfort them.

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There are two reasons, especially, why a reputation of this sort took hold. The first—which I needn't dwell on because it has little to do, really, with the content of Beckett's work—concerns the European intellectual climate in the postwar decade. It looks now as if most categories of praise with which to greet new talent involved large drafts of *Weltschmerz*. At that time, one recalls, the Sartre of *La Nausée* and the novels of Kafka were widely influential. Even in England and America, the temperament of the literary public was so dismal that Charles Dickens, for his reputation to survive, had to be reread as sympathetic to the murderers and villains among his characters. In 1940 Edmund Wilson, for example, felt compelled to apologize for Dickens's gales of good humor by treating them as so much camouflage for a deeper, darker purpose. "The ache of modernism" —Thomas Hardy's phrase from fifty years earlier—became fully pertinent just then, suggesting that the regnant critical *ism* was not an ideology or even a point of view, but rather a feeling of pain. Against this background, only the more anguished hues of an artist's work were likely to be caught.

The second reason is that, on the face of it, there is a distinct pertinence to Beckett in the vocabulary of philosophical or religious existentialism—with its version of hope that is like despair, or divine presence that is like divine absence, or like the "divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia" about which Lucky prates in *Godot*. If one thinks of the condition of the protagonists of *Molloy* or *Malone Dies*, it isn't hard to see why they seemed to embody the anxious metaphysical dilemmas that were the preoccupation of intellectuals. The Beckett heroes, so absurd and minimal and derelict, crawling through mud

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or packed in sand, are Irish first cousins of the "poor, bare, forked animal" that Lear stumbles on in the rain. A well-known essay by Jan Kott is called "*King Lear* or Endgame?" and Beckett's texts seem to cooperate readily with such readings.

But in the end such critical essays are not satisfactory. They put Beckett to good exegetical use as texts for vehemently predisposed sermons, but they fail to account for the peculiar effect of pleasure that Beckett seeks to convey. Given the emphasis of such critics as Kott, or A. Alvarez, or Raymond Federman in an influential and particularly abyss-bound book called *Journey to Chaos*—an emphasis on Beckett's hopelessness and spiritual desolation—it is understandable that these critics will be reluctant to confront what may be the chief literary feature of the work: a puzzling gap between the dire implications of its themes and a strategy of presentation that keeps the reader comfortable and secure. Federman and company have staked much on an "affect" of moral and aesthetic disorientation that perhaps just isn't there, although it looks as if it should be. I've said that the condition of Molloy or Malone seems to embody anxious metaphysical dilemmas, but what do we make of the fact that they are spared the anxious metaphysical consequences? They come from their creator equipped with a knack, not so much for overcoming as for evading the full force of their degradation, so that a smiling air, however drolly, attends them. They muddle through, in other words, whereas in the Lear world, or in Kierkegaard or Nietzsche, no such muddling through is possible; and it is this that separates Beckett from the angst-drenched sources of his thematic concerns.

In saying that not enough attention has been given to Beckett's secret benignity, I don't mean that his comedy, as such, has been ignored. No, he has had his turn under those joyless lights by which we inspect a writer's comic art. By now it is a part of received opinion that his ancestry as a comedian extends backward through Buster Keaton and Pierrot to Shakespeare's fools. But this high-comic pedigree is ultimately rather solemn, an edifying tradition rather than a comforting one, and it is not unrelated to the view that Beckett's humor is itself disturbing and horrific. My premise is that Beckett's idea of the world is indeed horrific but that his artistic purpose is to spare us its pains.

To recall the aesthetic effect I have in mind, one has only to conjure up Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, coming to center stage and seeming to take upon himself, in a fit of noble words, the burden of an uncertain human destiny:

> In this immense confusion, one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—Or for night to fall. We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?

His firmness is moving—or would be, except that behind him someone else, Pozzo, has fallen and is crying out for help, and Vladimir, continuing to mourn the mortal predicament in the abstract, pays no attention:

> All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to guile them with proceedings which—how shall I say—which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths?

Vladimir sounds here as if he were delivering a paper on the meaning of *Godot*—a better-than-average paper because the questions he takes up are the salient ones: how to fashion a commitment in a universe that gives no validating sign of response; how to sustain the significance of gestures that we are doomed to repeat endlessly and ineffectually. These are the mind-chilling unanswerables. But in the immediate dramatic situation they are mainly just ridiculous. Nothing in what he says could prevent Vladimir from helping Pozzo to his feet. Beckett seems to be mocking and deflating those desperate cosmological issues with which the play itself grapples. His comedy seems to limit and contain their actuality and pertinence, unlike the comedy of Lear's fool, who is always bringing us up against the hard facts. The effect in Beckett, entirely characteristic once we begin to notice it, is that of a stay of execution, granted in spite of the doom the play so earnestly announces. In this light, Beckett's work is a reprieve from critical angst rather than its literary expression.

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Plainly this feeling of relief from consequences has much to do with the distinctive pleasure of Beckett. It is something like a pattern. Serious themes raise ugly heads, threatening situations arise, and then suddenly or simultaneously the threat is reduced, ludicrously or scatologically, and we emerge unscathed. Like the Beckett heroes themselves, we are rescued by the surprisingly merciful devices of the writer from the otherwise appropriate emotions of fear and loathing. The pleasure is greater or lesser according to the degree of danger we have the illusion of risking. It is like the pleasure we take in our false bravery on a roller-coaster ride. We ride at the very brink of what Vladimir calls the "abyssal depths," while knowing that Beckett has a sure hand on the controls.

Of course it is risky to base a reading of Beckett on such a broad presumption of how readers are affected by him—something that can't be tested, after all. I can do no more than report my own impression that Beckett, despite the roar of his metaphysics, keeps the reader (or playgoer) curiously safe and sound. It is open to anyone to say that Beckett's work is authentically harrowing and has sent him to bed weeping unrelievedly. But the truth is, I think, that there is a great deal of pretentiousness in the claim that Beckett's void, or the void of latter-day existentialism, is a painful place. This pretense Georg Lukács dismissed with the phrase "the Grand Hotel Abyss," meant to suggest the luxuries and complacency that nihilism affords. And Beckett's special province as a writer is just there, among the pleasures of the void. I feel safe in supposing that even the most crisis-minded of his readers, those with the greatest appetite for despair, have had their cozy half hours with such a passage as the following, in which Molloy speaks of his aged mother:

> I called her Mag, when I had to call her something. And I called her Mag because for me, without my knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat upon it, better than any other letter would have done. And at the same time I satisfied a deep and doubtless unacknowledged need, the need to have a Ma, that is a mother, and to proclaim it, audibly.

Molloy is surely contemptible, but his prose style is impressive. In the felicitous syllable "Mag," for instance, he establishes an admirable harmony between his need for his mother and his hatred of her. Gracefully he eludes all the potential schism and dilemma of his feeling. Moreover, there are no consequences to be suffered for the use of this double-dealing word, because she has been, "for countless years," as "deaf as a post." How Molloy deals with her deafness is told in the passage that follows, which has the flavor, not incidentally, of the account of Wemmick's "Aged P." in *Great Expectations:*

> I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull. One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five goodbye. I was hard put to ram this into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end. That she should confuse yes, no, I don't know and goodbye, was all the same to me, I confused them myself. But that she should associate the four knocks with anything but money was something to be avoided at all costs. During the period of training, therefore, at the same time as I administered the four knocks on her skull, I stuck a banknote under her nose or in her mouth. In the innocence of my heart! For she seemed to have lost, if not absolutely all notion of mensuration, at least the faculty of counting beyond two.

"Such predicaments [as Molloy's] may appear comical to the reader," writes Raymond Federman sternly, "but for the heroes themselves these abortive gestures produce mental confusion and an acute awareness of failure." Federman, committed as he is to understanding Beckett's fiction as "an affirmation of the negative," is deaf on principle to the humor in the above passage. But the rest of us are free to observe that Molloy actually manages very well for himself. In his ambivalence toward his mother, in those flip-flops of affirmation and negation wherein he himself confuses "yes" and "no" and "I don't know"—in short, under the fretful burden of all the uncertainties which are so perilous and disabling to the race at large—Molloy may beat upon his mother's skull quite guiltlessly and pleasantly. Presumably we empathize with this aggression against the parent out of our own reserves of aggressive feeling, and it arouses by empathy our guilt and fear of punishment. But Molloy is not punished; he is even rewarded, with money. Although it is not the "comfort to those in need" that the Swedish Academy perhaps had in mind, com-

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fort is nonetheless the right word for what abounds here.

To treat another aspect of this "comfort," I'll have to risk belaboring the motherhood section of *Molloy:*

> I think she was quite incontinent, both of faeces and water, but a kind of prudishness made us avoid the subject when we met, and I could never be certain of it. In any case it can't have amounted to much, a few niggardly goat-droppings every two or three days. The room smelt of ammonia, oh not merely of ammonia, but of ammonia, ammonia.

The soothing, disinfectant repetition at the end gives us the note. The tone of this fantasy is not merely comfortable; it is even self-satisfied. Again the mother is insulted with impunity—she is literally besmirched. Her incontinence is both a guilty image and a funny one, but the guilt is comically exorcised by the pretense of gentility and delicacy: "a kind of prudishness made us avoid the subject." Another source of the deep assurance that sounds in the writing is harder to describe. It resides in the gap between the highness of the language and the lowness of the subject matter. This disparity itself gives pleasure by signifying the superiority of the lofty, discursive mind over the body that is its somewhat disgusting encumbrance.

Freud identified this elevation of psychic over bodily processes as a source of comic pleasure. In a comment that is suggestive for the whole gamut of body gags in Beckett, Freud wrote in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* that "a person appears comic to us if, in comparison with ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure [of energy] on his bodily functions and too little on his mental ones; and it cannot be denied that in both these cases our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him." In this way, the reader pleasurably identifies with Molloy, whose precise and shapely expressions of his thought testify to his mental powers, and looks down with Molloy on his mother, who is presented entirely in terms of her uncontrollable bodily functions. So the passage is not only funny; it is also flattering to the reader. Or, following Freud's hint, it is funny *because* it is flattering.

It is important to see how far we have already come from the assertion of the central tradition of Beckett criticism: that Molloy and the other protagonists are disconcerting emblems of our radical alienation and inadequacy. On the contrary, rather than disconcerting us, they reinforce a Cartesian confidence in the supremacy of mind over body. The part of Molloy from which I have been quoting might seem a special case, because in it Molloy is condescending to a person more debased (almost incredibly) than himself. Molloy, too, is "quite incontinent"—"I don't diffuse the perfumes of Araby myself," he admits—but he is as remote from the mechanical dysfunction of his own body as he is from his mother's. The isolation and security of the regnant consciousness remain intact.

The impression of mind beholding the tribulations of body with condescension and disdain is everywhere in Beckett. In the literary history of this century, the clash of attitudes about the body among writers collectively called "modernist" makes up an interesting subplot, which Beckett, an eminent figure in the generation that followed, has inherited in all its complexity. D. H. Lawrence thought that he lived in a time in which the claims of the body had come to be despised. He imagined our physical nature as a kind of flower in sexual heat, and he argued with passion and sadness that it had been plowed under by the prevalent cult of mind. Of T. S. Eliot it is not too much to say that he displayed mainly contempt for the body, at least for live bodies; the imagery of *The Waste Land* makes famous use of dead ones. And the body, even as a corpse, could not be plowed under deeply enough for Eliot. Bury it as one might, it would infect the garden of sensibility; it was an incorrigible enemy to spirit. But the real preparation for Beckett's attitude can be found in the work of his countrymen Yeats and Joyce, whose views of the body were more equivocal. Yeats, to begin with, was not so prissy as Eliot. Indeed, he shared Lawrence's passion for the passionate, although he imagined a life of passion that was a good deal better bred than what Lawrence could have wished. Increasingly in his later years, he wrote of his worn body as of unwanted baggage, "a sort of battered kettle at the heel" that was a drag on his yearning for tran-

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scendence; but even then he was more willing than Eliot to accept the body as a given. He was interested in the body as a place where aspirations for something higher than itself were planted, and in cyclical or elliptical ways in which body and soul were linked, as in the cycle of death and resurrection. "Love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement": in that line there is a significant anatomical acuteness that forecasts, despite a wide difference in tone, the excremental amours of Beckett's characters.

But Yeats's ellipse, with its twin focuses of birth and corruption, is simple as compared with Joyce's parabolics. In 1929, some of Joyce's admirers, the young Beckett among them, brought out a volume called *Our Exagnination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. Beckett's contribution is both an explication and a defense. He defends the apparent verbal chaos of Joyce's work by showing that it is shaped from within by a use of Giambattista Vico's theories of history and language. According to Beckett, Vico described an "ineluctable circular progression" of three states of human society, with appropriate stages in the development of language, and although these three states are denominated in a variety of ways, they can be reduced to the abstractions of Birth, Maturity, and Corruption—and then a fourth state, which is Rebirth, beginning the cycle again. The effect of Vico's cycle on Joyce's writing, Beckett claims, is the identity of contraries, the end point of one cycle simultaneous with the beginning of another, especially birth and death: "The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical." Beckett's demonstrations of Joyce's use of this principle are effective. He cites "A good clap, a fore wedding, a bad wake, and tell hell's well," and "by four hands of forethought the first babe of reconcilement is laid in its last cradle of hume sweet hume."

Twenty years later, in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett echoes the simultaneity of cradle and tomb: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps." Molloy's incontinent mother—birth and corruption—is obviously another instance. In fact, such images persist in Beckett's writing down to the present. What attraction does the identity of these opposites have for him? For one thing, it should be read at least partly in connection with his urging of a separation of mind from corrupting body. We have seen his disgust with our physical nature, and also his utter incapacity to take its natural processes for granted. Excremental facts are constantly present in Beckett, even to the coolest mind, such as Molloy's. The only hope, therefore, is in some such scheme as Vico's, by which our higher nature is periodically redeemed from corruption. Beckett emphasizes the dynamic quality in Vico's four stages, which he sees less as discrete units than as a constant and fluid conversion, so that, as it were, the body does not become stuck in its own mud. The hope is, precisely, that in the whirling revolutions of these stages, the mind will be shot off, freed suddenly from the endless repetitions the body ties it to; and, paradoxically, that the mind will then come to rest, because "maximal speed is a state of rest." One of Beckett's most striking pictures is in his first novel, *Murphy*. In pursuit of ease from the affliction of having a physical nature at all, Murphy straps himself into his rocking chair and begins to rock:

> The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the iridescence was gone, the cry in the mew was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free.

Once again Beckett seems to speak to us of rescue, of hoisting our pure selves clear of the body, uninhibited, unsoiled. To feel gratitude, it is only necessary that we share his notion that our gross physical needs (in Murphy's case, love) offend and oppress the isolate mental essence of our nature. And when we have put the matter this way, we are face to face with that which is hermetic and fastidious and unhealthy in the pleasure Beckett seeks to give.

For in the end Beckett employs Joyce's means to Eliot's ends: his obsession with the regenerative cycle only masks more contempt and loathing for the body, and it is this contempt that separates him from Joyce. Bluntly, he is simpler than Joyce, as loathing is simpler than a thoroughgoing ambivalence. Take, for

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example, Beckett's story "First Love," in which the narrator prefers sleeping with a chamber pot to sleeping with his mistress, on the theory that any receptacle will do and that the chamber pot, really a stewpan, is less troublesome than a woman. This is a conceptual pun, not only on the equation of ejaculation and urination, but also on the idea of woman as vessel. Compare this with any of a series of scenes in *Ulysses* in which there is a coincidence of creativity and excretion, such as those in which Stephen urinates when he has finished a line of poetry, or Bloom dreams of writing a prizewinning story while in the outhouse, or they pass water side by side to mark their union in the chapter known as "Ithaca." By contrast to Beckett's, Joyce's irony in such places seems particularly delicate. Partly the urine parodies the flow of artistic or erotic expression, but it isn't only parodic. It is also a celebration, a proud, physical sign of the triumph of harmony and human making. So our bodily needs are not, as they are in Beckett, merely reductive. Joyce gives a nearly equal stress to the respective values of spirit and body, so that they shape a difficult but profoundly creative tension in his writing; whereas it has been part of Beckett's literary mission, evidently, to deliver us from such tension, to relieve that anxiety which attends the deep conflicts in the sensibility of the high moderns. He has created nothing that could trouble us as the image of Molly Bloom can, and as a result he has created nothing as emotionally profound.

The essay on *Finnegans Wake* is one of two deep bows to his literary masters with which Beckett began his career. The other is a study of Proust, published in 1931. As with Joyce, the young critic delineates a central tension and complexity that he will go on, in his own later writing, to deflate and reduce. In this case the subject is not the Cartesian duality but rather "the cancer Time," with its two attributes, memory and habit. Habit, of course, is the villain. It is like a contract that compels our perceptions to conform to our expectations. We see only what we're used to seeing, and therefore we don't really see "the spectacle of reality" at all. Beckett has a brilliant metaphor for this. As creatures of habit "we are in the position of the tourist . . . whose aesthetic experience consists in a series of identifications and for whom Baedeker is the end rather than the means." (The importance of the Baedeker metaphor is discussed in an as yet unpublished essay by Paul Bové entitled "Beckett's Dreadful Postmodern.") Thus we are alien and hypostatic, cut off from both the "cruelties" and the "enchantments" of the real by the artificiality of habit as a guide. For Beckett, Proust's whole art dwells in those moments of remission from habit in which we encounter the chaos of actuality, and can experience each detail "in the light of ignorance"—that is, "detached from the sanity of a cause."

> The narrator cannot sleep in a strange room, is tortured by a high ceiling, being used to a low ceiling. What is taking place? The old pact is out of date. It contained no clause treating of high ceilings. The habit of friendship for the low ceiling is ineffectual, must die in order that a habit of friendship for the high ceiling may be born. Between this death and that birth, reality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organised to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat—and also of its beauty.

With lyric enthusiasm Beckett presents those places in Proust where, by a change in environment or by the sudden arousal of "involuntary memory"—the madeleine—habit's hold is broken. He looks on admiringly as Proust braves the "threat" of a memory for the sake of its beauty, or risks cruelties for the sake of enchantments; Beckett is quite sure, too, that the enchantments are really there, and worth the price. It is interesting to see Samuel Beckett celebrate what are at best the partial and transient and ineffably hampered victories over mundanity that Proust, like Joyce, holds out. These are sometimes hardly more than possibilities, but in the end they are all that these writers could offer with any conviction. To settle for the world upon such terms is to affirm the world as it really is. And we do not think of the author of *Endgame* as affirming the world as it really is. From *Endgame:*

> I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter—and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and

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drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! (Pause) He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (Pause) He alone had been spared.

Endgame is a vision of death by repetition: the bad joke that is life has lost its vitality by being endlessly retold. Mercifully, from the point of view of the play, the world has come to a stop. Possibilities of momentary, Proust-like remissions of the disease have ceased to flicker.

Apparently what happened between the essay on Proust and the play of 1957 is this: More and more, Beckett has pursued as a theme the absoluteness of the fatality of habit rather than the riskiness and uncertainty of its opposite, the vagrant chance that we can free our experience of the world from habitual preconceptions. In the 1931 essay, art seems to him the occasion of such experience, open to the sensual chaos of living. But the art he practices in the decades that follow is increasingly the art of the end of experience: *fin de partie*. He answers what is shifting, copious, and inclusive in the form of *La Recherche* with what is closed, exclusive, and surgically precise in the structures of his own work. Proust was a gourmand of feeling, but for this appetite Beckett substitutes a concern, as he has said, only for "the shape of the sentence." Perfection of art more than compensates him, it seems, for the loss of the world.

There is a melancholy joke in *Endgame* that makes this predilection explicit. A man needs a pair of trousers for a New Year's celebration. The tailor promises that they will be ready in four days. At the end of four days he is told they are not ready; he must come back in a week. A week later, he is told to come back in ten days, and so forth. Soon it is spring, and the trousers are still unfinished. "In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!" "But my dear sir," the tailor answers, "look—(disdainful gesture, disgustedly)—at the world—and look—(loving gesture, proudly)—at my TROUSERS!"

Of course Beckett is not the only twentieth-century artist who has preferred the ordered wholes of art to life's variety, but he acts upon his preference in a way peculiar to himself. And the irresponsibility of his way emerges if we summarize his difference from his immediate forerunners. Proust and Joyce and Lawrence declaim, in their different ways, against the end of experience, and work small rear-guard actions against it, although they have little hope, moving though it is, of success. In Beckett the struggle is over. The pained effort to achieve some leverage of consciousness in what he himself calls "a world collapsing endlessly" has come to a stop as his own work commences. It is just here that we can be most misled by those who see Beckett as memorializing our suffering over the loss of the world. In fact he records the loss, but records it, one should say instead, without a tear, because for him it represents above all the positive opportunity for the self-sufficiency of art. In the instant the chaotic demands of external things are silenced, he can shape his sentences as he wishes, and if he has only dead things to write about, that is all to the good, because dead things are fixed and quantifiable; they are more tractable to craft. After "the world dies," says Molloy, all we know "is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead." Although he began by valuing Proust's openness to the richness of experience, in the long run Beckett has sought something different: a respite from that anxious condition of ambiguities and half-lights in which the artist must work in order to apprehend the unshapely reality of the lived life.

I've taken two approaches to Beckett's work, one through his comic effects and the other through his early critical essays. They converge just where one doesn't expect to find Beckett: in a place singularly pristine, free from striving and tension. All teleologies have been lifted. Hugh Kenner has said that the tension in Beckett is between "the person and the mathematical zero." This will do, perhaps, for Beckett's first novel, *Murphy*, but for the work since then it must be said that the person is a less and less substantial entity, whereas mathematical zero occupies more and more, proportionately, of Beckett's

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thematic terrain. And this is increasingly so as Beckett aspires increasingly to the perfected internal coherences of his art; for zero has a structural perfection that other more complex integers, such as human ones, must envy. Take a look at *How It Is* (1961). Literally a crawling through filth from one sadistic encounter to another, uncomplicated by personality, it represents Beckett's starkest reduction of "the person." But it is also his most striking creation from the formal point of view: elaborately self-reflexive, involuted, meticulously shaped.

How It Is is the text that always comes to my mind when I hear the word (or solecism) "postmodern." Literary works so called are understood to be self-involved, to flirt with autism, to void themselves, purposely, of content. But in the light of Beckett's influence—which, needless to say, has been almost definitive of the avant-garde, especially in theater—"postmodern" appears to mean something like "post-painful." Certainly it goes beyond the elder modernists in questioning the epistemological certainties of the literary tradition—for instance, the narrative form of experience, or the wholeness and integrity of the self. When these traditions were put in question, say in Conrad or in *To the Lighthouse*, the moment represented a crisis whose effects on consciousness were real and disturbing. But the postmodern writer, by forswearing the connection between art and life, by reducing the human quality of art in order to pursue its intrinsic purposes more purely, has rendered his own skepticism harmless and inoffensive—so much ideational play in a void. A grand "So what?" hangs over even the most extreme formulations of Beckett and of such students of Beckett as Alain Robbe-Grillet and the Austrian playwright Peter Handke, a "So what?" that they themselves are in no position to answer, having discarded the language of values and moral consequence. By failing to answer, however, they fail to be radical, fail to be disturbing enough—and that is really and paradoxically Beckett's failure. In the end he offers the best example of a paradoxical tendency in contemporary literature, whereby, under the guise of experiments in form and language, we are actually being reconciled to our social and spiritual givens, confirmed in our complacency and stasis.

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No Good Reason

ANDREW GROSSBARDT

The letter mentioned no details, just the fact—
Vince is dead from spotted fever—and then
went on to better things, work or weather,
I've forgotten. It took months before
I learned of those last confusing days,
the doctor's wrong conclusion.
Vince is dead
in Montana and though I hardly knew him
I hold my breath as long as I can,
try to imagine the body swelling
with dark poison, muscles and nerves
gone suddenly lax, caught in the middle
of what must have seemed like someone else's
lousy joke.
For no good reason, I think now
of the black widow I found last month
sulking on the dying leaves of the pepper plant
you'd brought inside last fall and transplanted
in an old paint bucket. I'd never seen
one before, so it must have been from pictures
that I knew: dark body, red markings
distinct as blood.
For a few minutes I watched
fascinated yet afraid, some abstract horror
tugging at my gut. And then I grabbed
the nearest book from the kitchen table.
I took careful aim and swung. The body
came apart in a perfect shower of leaves
and tiny legs.
I sat down on the hard floor
and hugged my body to stop from shaking.
When you came home, I had you move the plant
back outside where it must belong,
where it still sits, where I can safely watch
the leaves turn black beneath their dense coat of ice.

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Eternity, I

FREDERICK MORGAN

One may define "eternity" in various ways—
as contemplation, say, passion or joy—
but preferably not as a blank stretch that runs on and on.
Quality sums it, not extent.

Call it intensification of the actual
to a point at which, cut free from the known web,
it plunges to its depths within yourself:

or, if you prefer, a process (which seems continuous)
whereby a second world in its reflections
makes real the images of what is now:

or give it, even, the name of nothingness,
the final staring void on which all other
voids may be visaged as transparent masks:

it touched me at all events this afternoon,
an ordinary afternoon in New York City,
in the eye of the blond child wearing a dark red tam
who looked at me laughing as I returned her ball—

in the meeting, a few blocks further north on Madison,
with a man who had cried in my room twenty years before—
in the sugary smell from the corner bakery store—

in the dream I adventured, asleep here in my chair,
of eating fruit in a jungle patio:
oranges, strawberries from glass bowls decked with mint—

and yet once more, at the clouded time of dusk
when mind, adrift, moved through its nearer voids
and first the diffident poem showed itself.

✪ FREDERICK MORGAN's collection of poems, *A Book of Change*, was nominated for a National Book Award in 1973. *Poems of the Two Worlds*, his second collection, was published earlier this year by University of Illinois Press.

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The Visible College in British Science

MARTIN GREEN

I. *Scientism and the Opposition*

It is now eighteen years since C. P. Snow gave the 1959 Rede Lecture at Cambridge, his famous talk on the two cultures. In that lecture he said that men trained in science inhabit a different mental world from those trained in the humanities; that there is a hostility between the two groups; and that this hostility—strongest in England but strong everywhere in the West—has disastrous consequences, political and imaginative, which only major educational changes can ameliorate. The magazine *Encounter* published extracts from the lecture in its May 1959 issue, and lively discussion followed in several countries. In *The Two Cultures: A Second Look* (1963) Snow speaks of feeling frustrated because some of the best articles on the subject were written in "less accessible" languages, like Hungarian and Japanese. In a 1970 essay he says that in the bibliography of the subject from 1964 to 1968 there were eighty-eight items in English alone; and in 1971 he speaks of being assured by the prime minister of Sweden that that country's educational system had changed in response to his argument.

But the most famous response was a violent attack by the literary critic F. R. Leavis, also given as a lecture in Cambridge, the 1961 Richmond Lecture. Leavis disallowed Snow's claim to speak for literature vis-à-vis science—or indeed for science—and so denied all validity to his description of the problem, if indeed there was a problem. Thereafter many other writers, including Lionel Trilling and Aldous Huxley, joined the literary side of the debate; and more recently John Holloway and Sir Peter Medawar, one on each side. Implicitly the men of letters have been on the defensive throughout. On Snow personally their comments have often been very aggressive, but to his argument that they are ignorant of, and hostile to, their times' major intellectual enterprise, they have offered only resistance or evasion.

That idea was not, of course, a new one. In his *Second Look*, Snow said, "Some of us had been discussing [it] for some time past." (Who those men were for whom he spoke is of great importance.) Already in 1956 he had an article on the subject in the *New Statesman*, where he contrasted, as in the Rede Lecture, the ebullient affirmativeness of science, exemplified by the physicist Rutherford's "This is the heroic age of science," with the embittered negativism of literature, exemplified by T. S. Eliot's "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper." By and large, Snow had confined himself, in 1956 and 1959, to describing each culture's stereotype of the other. But in 1963 he took the next step and asked explicitly, "How can one participate in modernist literature and yet share the modest difficult hopes for other human lives, which are the hopes of the scientific revolution?"

It has always been obvious that Snow was taking up where other people had left off. There are large historical precedents for the Snow-Leavis exchange, notably T. H. Huxley's debate with Matthew Arnold in the late nineteenth century. But to pursue those parallels—or indeed to pursue this topic in most other scholarly ways—has a somewhat deadening effect. Nevertheless there is, I believe, a more useful context into which to put the debate, and the first step toward evoking it is to conjure up the memory of H. G. Wells. Both

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as novelist and as ideologue, Wells was patron to the scientific culture. His *Outline of History* (1920) was the first such book to give more prominence to technological developments in history than to personalities or ideas, and it was recognized as something new; in 1920 sixty workers in one Sheffield workshop all put down two and a half guineas each for a copy. As a culture critic, Wells was sponsor and patron of the scientistic attack on men of letters. At the 1917 meeting of the British Science Guild, he described the two-cultures split, and said it made literary and political men "unscientific, unprogressive, and unenterprising, full of conceit about their 'broader outlook' and secretly scornful of science." In his quarrel with Henry James, he said that the latter had betrayed the human race in the name of artistic purity, and he wrote to James Joyce in 1928 (he had earlier admired both writers' work) that he, Wells, needed to believe in a political world in which a "big, unifying and concentrating force" was possible. "That game attracted and holds me. For it, I want language and statement to be as simple and clear as possible." Hence, he said, he was out of sympathy with Joyce. "I was brought up under the delusion of political responsibility. It seems a fine thing for you to defy and break up. To me not in the least."

One can find similar passages in Snow's work. In his 1958 preface to *The Search*, he describes the scientist's stereotype of literary men as "defeated, unvirile, profoundly selfish, unconcerned about their fellow man, indifferent to the social condition, intellectually untruthful." The kind of literary men to whom this applies most plausibly is the group of dandies of Snow's own generation: the Brian Howards, the Harold Actons, the Sitwells. (Ironically, these also fit F. R. Leavis's stereotype of the literary man at his worst; in certain aspects of cultural history, Leavis and Snow are fighting on the same side.) Like Wells, Snow has persistently resisted and repudiated the modernist movement in literature.

It is obvious that Snow owes a good deal to Wells as a model. In *The Search* (1934), the early novel which may still be his best, the descriptions of the narrator's family and school experience are very Wellsian. In fact, the two writers' friendship began when Wells wrote to Snow praising *The Search*.

One of the things the two men shared is a loyalty to an older idea of literature. When Wells died in 1946, it was J. B. Priestley, himself no enthusiast for modernism, who was chosen to pronounce the eulogy, in which he called Wells "the great prophet of our time . . . who worked with passionate loyalty for the whole toiling, contriving, endlessly hopeful family of Mankind." Almost the only other novelist they might have found to say such things would have been Snow. To most literary men in 1946—certainly to Leavis—Wells, Priestley, and Snow were all historical curiosities. What they called Wells's optimism and his "crudity of mind"—his scientism—prevented his being taken seriously.

Associated with Wells was his close friend Sir Richard Gregory, the editor of *Nature* and statesman of British science. Wells's fictional images, figures such as Kipps and Mr. Polly, much resemble Gregory. In turn, Gregory admired Wells tremendously, and found that Wells's book *The World Set Free* (1914) contained the creed he himself believed in—that is, his faith in the greatness of scientific work and its consequences. "There is not a single writer who has your knowledge," he wrote to Wells. "Taken as a body, literary people are hopelessly ignorant of everything scientific." In 1916 Gregory published his most famous book, *Discovery*. (A scientific monthly, which Snow edited in the 1930s, was named after it.) Here he argued that the sciences *were* compatible with the humanities, if only the latter would recognize the cultural value of the former. He also tried to give science a hagiology of its own. "It is necessary to believe in the holiness of scientific work," he said.

This idea reminds us of the Saint-Simonians in nineteenth-century France, the religioscientific sect that wanted to make engineers the priesthood of a new world order. This historical reminiscence is not trivial. Both Wells and Gregory were, in some sense of the word, technocrats. Wells wrote to Gregory in 1921 that "Science will endure and rule, but Labour will pass away." Both men believed in expertise and disbelieved in democracy.

The idea of technocracy, or scientism, is a crucial one, because significant traces of it can be detected in all the people I am talking about. But the word technocracy is unfortunate because it is so loaded. I use it to mean a

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faith in planning and in the application of scientific methods, which goes beyond most people's interpretation. But I do not imply that such faith is in all cases sinister—or any more sinister than its alternatives. Even more emphatically, I do not associate this faith with an inhumanly cold or hard, or inhumanly serene and bland, temperament. Wells, like T. H. Huxley, on whom he modeled himself as a young man, was a man filled with stress—a quite unstable type, temperamentally an outsider, whose enthusiasm for science was combative rather than confident or serene.

But neither Wells nor Gregory, nor yet Rutherford, the great man of Snow's Cambridge, was of the group with which Snow has, as a thinker, most intimately identified himself, the men for whom he spoke in *The Two Cultures* and other works. As a group these men must be described rather speculatively, for in fact they comprised a series of interconnecting groups, with a few dominating personalities among them. What connects them is that they were all young scientists in the England of the 1920s. All were very gifted; all had strong left-wing political convictions; and all were particularly concerned with the extrascientific relations of science—relations with the state, its political parties and institutions, and with the culture, other kinds of intellectuals, and the plain man.

The most important of these scientists were J. B. S. Haldane (1892–1964), the geneticist; J. D. Bernal (1901–1971), the crystallographer; and P. M. S. Blackett (1897–1974), who won a Nobel Prize for physics in 1948. All three were unusually wide-ranging in the branches of science they investigated—as well as nonscientific subjects—and might have won even greater fame had they limited their efforts to fewer fields. This was most true of Bernal, who played a large part in the investigation of the structure of the DNA molecule. He provided crucial ideas and intellectual excitement and conviction to other people whose names now occur in the official records of that discovery. Blackett, among other things, initiated the study of operations research, out of which developed the enormous postwar industry now known as research and development. Haldane was, again among other things, one of the most brilliant scientific popularizers of all time.

Around these three were grouped, in various ways, C. H. Waddington (born in 1905), the geneticist; N. W. Pirie (born in 1907), the virus physiologist; Joseph Needham (born in 1900), the biologist and later the historian of science and civilization in China; and Lancelot Hogben (1895–1975), the author of such greatly successful popularizations as *Mathematics for the Million* and *Science for the Citizen*. Popularization was important to these men because of their concern with the social relations of science. Gary Werskey, a scholar who has studied them, has called them the Visible College, partly in allusion to their popular visibility and partly in allusion to the Invisible College of the seventeenth century. J. G. Crowther (born in 1900) and Ritchie Calder (born in 1906) were also part of this scientific movement. Crowther was for many years science correspondent at the *Manchester Guardian*, and sponsored numerous series of scientific books at Oxford University Press. Calder was science editor of the *News Chronicle*, was on the board of the *New Statesman*, and worked at UNESCO after the war. Both men wrote books about the social relations of science, as well as popularizations. And finally there were two bureaucrat-statesmen, C. P. Snow and Solly Zuckerman. Both broke off scientific careers for administrative work, and both are now peers of the realm, Snow having been Parliamentary Under Secretary to the Ministry of Technology and Zuckerman Chief Scientific Adviser to the cabinet of Harold Wilson. They formed crucial links between the scientists of this group and various forms of political power, from as far back as the 1930s to the 1970s.

Snow's relation to the Visible College is intricate and in some sense paradoxical. He felt himself very unlike them. But at the same time his novels bridged the gap that split everyone else apart. They offered themselves, or were taken to offer themselves, as models of literary works that integrated the cultures of both science and literature. The fact that Snow is speaking for those men is paradoxical, in that they were all, in their way, rebels and protesters, while Snow is squareness itself. His every phrase proclaims that he believes in social forms, in marriage, in work, in society's rewards and pleasures—the glittering prizes that life still has to offer. (Of course, these traits in Snow are matched by

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other quite different ones in the depths of his nature. He sees himself as characterized most crucially by melancholy and skepticism, but still that first set of traits marks him among men of letters.) And the main paradox is that Snow's novels bear no trace of that futuristic fantasy so strong in Wells's scientific romances, Haldane's *Daedalus*, and Bernal's *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Although he says that scientists have the future in their bones, Snow himself has the past in his. His fiction is essentially reminiscent and nostalgic, inquisitive about men's motives and memories, in love with institutions and with the Establishment in every form.

When I talked to Snow in June 1976, it was at the House of Lords, and I reflected that that setting must be as congenial to him, on its grander scale, as the college in which he set some of his novels. He has a strong sense of duty toward the future; his conscience and his prudence are oriented in that direction. "We are beginning to shrug off our sense of the future," he warns the Western countries in *Science and Government* (1960). "We are becoming existential societies—and we are living in the same world with future-directed societies." But his imagination turns toward the past. (When I put that to him, he laughed. "Of course. I'm a realistic novelist.") Yet in his nonfiction Snow has written out of his conscience and prudence, and as spokesman for writers who, some of them, have strongly futuristic imaginations. He says he has always felt himself to be very unlike them. His identification with them is not one of similarity so much as of admiration. It is Snow's great strength to have been a hero-worshiper, or at least an enthusiast for the remarkable abilities of other men, ready to acknowledge superior powers.

As a novelist of scientific life, Snow is to be associated less with Haldane, Bernal, and Blackett than with his friend F. P. Bowden (1903–1968), professor of surface physics at Cambridge. Bowden's story (according to his Royal Society obituary) is partly told in *The Search*, and he also appears, as Getliffe, in the *Strangers and Brothers* novel-sequence. But quite apart from questions of portraiture, Bowden corresponds to the scientist of Snow's fictional imagination, as Gregory did to Wells's. Bowden is described, in the obituary, as not interested in politics but tough and ambitious, very reticent and yet warm and earthy—a man of great force and of great taste, in a somewhat old-fashioned style. He was born of poor parents in Tasmania, but came to Cambridge in 1927 as to a predestined home, instantly loving its institutions and rituals. He is a fine objective correlative for Snow's sensibility, and in that sense his personality is reflected in all of Snow's novels.

But Haldane, Bernal, and Blackett are echoed in Snow's essays, men of larger ideological scope with whom he was intimate by admiration rather than by common sensibility. Indeed, the three were quite different one from another, even in their Marxism. Bernal was born Irish and Roman Catholic (although there is a rumor that his family had originally been Jewish). He first came to England when he was fourteen, and while at an English public school he was pious to the verge of fanaticism. When still an undergraduate he was converted to communism and was equally fervent and wholesale about that. He remained a romantic Irish patriot always, Snow says, seeing things English from a humorous distance. At the same time, Bernal had a highly abstract and pure intellect, and—in an eccentric way—was a very genial and gregarious personality, so that his fervor was neither grim nor brutal. By Snow's account, he was an extremely attractive, and indeed a good, man. He was a famously brilliant talker, and notoriously bohemian in his manner of living; he is the man Snow drew as Constantine in *The Search*. In a "Personal Portrait," which Snow wrote of him to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bernal's *Social Function of Science*, he notes: "In taste, to some extent in spirit, he has stayed a child of the early 20s. Donne and Joyce are his writers, Picasso and Cézanne his painters." Joyce appealed to him not only as a modernist author, but as another ex-Catholic Irishman. Snow says Bernal could easily be imagined as one of Joyce's circle of Dubliners—as a genial but still "difficult" Stephen Dedalus. When interviewed for a post at Cambridge in 1927, Bernal refused to answer any questions with more than yes or no (he was always sullen under formal circumstances, Snow tells us) until asked what he would do if he were put in charge. Then he threw back his head and talked brilliantly

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for forty-five minutes. He was never made a fellow of a college, although he stayed in Cambridge ten years. One don at Christ's College said, "No one with hair like that can be *sound*." All of which bespeaks a defiant freedom.

Nevertheless Bernal made himself a tireless attender and organizer of communist-inspired committees, conferences, unions, and petitions, and a tireless investigator of the "social relations of science" at the humblest level of statistics-collecting. His loyalty to communism never wavered, although he went through crises of conscience over the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956, the revelations about Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He won a Stalin Peace Prize in 1953, and was welcomed at the highest level in both Russia and China. He wrote a great deal, from an orthodox Marxist standpoint, about the capitalist organization of science, making a specialty of "scientific documentation," the apparatus of scientific journals, et cetera. In all this work he was quite a dull writer, and in fact a dull thinker—in marked contrast to his brilliance as a talker, as a scientist, and indeed as a writer in certain more speculative pieces. The dull books were written out of duty to his political faith, and it is clear that Bernal had a strong sense of duty, despite his willful manner and the bohemian flamboyance of his life.

J. B. S. Haldane was born and grew up in Oxford, the son of one of England's great scientific families. In 1903 his parents built a large house, called Cherwell, which Haldane inherited in 1961, the same year, having repudiated England, that he became a citizen of India. His father was professor of physiology at Oxford, and he allowed JBS to help in experiments even in his childhood. His father's uncle also had been a professor of science at Oxford, and his own uncle, Lord Haldane, was a lawyer who became Lord Chancellor and then Minister of War—but was also head of the British Science Guild and a friend of Wells and the Fabians. His mother and his aunt were notable women. JBS was an intellectual prodigy who developed an aggressively loud and rude manner as he grew up. He was assertively contradictory and ribald, which seems to have been a disguise for an inner self in some ways—above all, sexually—very unsure and undeveloped.

Haldane's Marxism came later in life than did Bernal's, but by the mid-1930s he was the leading scientific pundit of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He was on the editorial board of the *Daily Worker*, and was often in the headlines of other papers. During the Spanish civil war he gave the government of Spain advice on air raids and gas warfare, and his wife and stepson were publicly involved in that war. He was first of all a public figure, a pundit, a performer—not an organizer like Bernal—and he performed on the national rather than the international scene. For him, being a geneticist, the great crisis of faith in communism was over the Soviets' backing of Lysenko and the crushing of Lysenko's opponents—among them Vavilov, who was a friend of Haldane's. Haldane remained loyal to the party for a long time, but finally had to resign on the Lysenko issue in 1950. He remained a radical, however; he left England in protest against its aggression at Suez, and went to India to practice a Gandhian nonviolent philosophy, and ultimately to become a citizen and practically a Hindu. He had, it is clear, a genuinely adventurous spirit inside a somewhat false persona.

As a scientist, Haldane's career was obstructed not only by his politics and his diversity of interests, but by his incompetence, even perversity, as an administrator, and his rebelliousness against all authority. In the Second World War, he refused to move his laboratory out of London during the blitz, and got into the papers for fighting a university beadle. Allied with this rebellious spirit was a general outrageousness. According to P. B. Medawar, he once refused to preside at a lecture, after promising to do so, on the grounds that the lecturer's wife had sexually assaulted him. But as a professor of scientism, as opposed to science, his persona advanced his career. Arthur C. Clarke, the science popularizer and science-fiction writer, has called Haldane the "finest intellect it has ever been my privilege to know," and speaks of the brilliant ideas he threw out to the science fictionists' advantage—on space travel, for instance. Clarke compares Haldane to Conan Doyle's scientist in *The Lost World:* Professor Challenger, a big, blustering baby with a giant scientific brain attached, which is how Haldane presented himself.

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P. M. S. Blackett was a naval officer (in the First World War) before he became a scientist, and he retained much of a naval officer's bearing and manner, the habits of correctness and command, all his life. His father had been a well-to-do stockbroker (his grandfather was the vicar of Croydon), and one of his two sisters became an architect, the other a psychologist. Being of the official and professional class, he was more correct in his temperamental style than were Bernal and Haldane—not at all given to "performances." Of the three, he was closest to Snow in imagination and judgment (Snow says they "thought alike" from earliest manhood), though in manner and in behavior much more austere and autocratic. Snow says that he borrowed from Blackett some of the political attitudes he implanted in Getliffe, that much admired character in his novel-sequence. Blackett's politics were more "practical" than Bernal's or Haldane's. Blackett once described these politics as Fabian, a suggestive label for the politics all three men gradually engaged in. I use the word Fabian not in its sense of delay tactics or of parliamentary procedures, but in its sense of intellectual pride, and faith in planning, and the application of scientific methods to society; that is, Fabian in the sense of technocratic. Blackett's Marxism was not in the least internationalist. As Snow said, de Gaulle would have understood Blackett, or at least should have.

Such were the men who raised the issue of the two cultures before Snow brought it to the public. Their opinions and achievements gave his words resonance for his readers. Among their books, the two futurist pieces, Haldane's *Daedalus* and Bernal's *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, are the most important; because it is the forward leap of the mind, particularly when it is playful in style, that is most alien to the literary culture. As happens so often with ideas, those conveyed by scientism's playful expressions were the most revealing and the least acceptable.

Daedalus takes it for granted that our world (of 1924) will soon evolve into a stable industrial society; it argues that the nation which does so first will inherit the earth—and the most likely candidate for this achievement is Russia. Haldane foresees a shift to wind and solar energy, and the storage of that energy in liquid and hydrogen form, a scheme now proposed by modern ecologists. He says the arts have decayed because artists have not understood science or industrialism; and, as exceptions that prove the rule, he cites Samuel Butler and Norman Douglas. He suggests novelties to come, like babies born in test tubes and the supersession of agriculture when cellulose is rendered humanly digestible—novelties that will amount to cutting crucial links of tradition to our past. He talks of biological "inventions" of the past, like the domestication of animals and the shift in sexual interest from the steatopygia of African art to the modern concentration on women's breasts and faces. As future inventions of this sort, he predicts the complete separation of sex from reproduction, the state control of mental experience, and a world state. He quotes from Boethius: "We must learn not to take traditional morals too seriously."

Especially at the end of the book, Haldane hints at an affiliation with Wells and Wellsian scientism. The biologist, he says, is the most romantic figure on earth today. He seems to be a poor little scrubby underpaid man, groping blindly among the mazes of the ultramicroscopic. But the great radicals are always those in whom reason has become a passion (he cites Bentham, Voltaire, Darwin, and Marx as examples), and the biologist is the modern exemplar of that passion. This completely rationalized biology—controlled by a "scrubby little man"—is a very Wellsian idea; it is also roughly the idea against which Leavis and Lawrence, and the New Critics and Southern Agrarians in America, organized their naysaying.

The title of Bernal's book describes its three divisions: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Speaking of the world, he says that so far twentieth-century men have been living on the discoveries of early and mid-nineteenth-century science, which built a macromechanical age of power and metals. Our age is to be governed by the micromechanics of quantum theory. Instead of a world of metals, we shall have one of fabrics, light and elastic, massive enough only for their highly specified purposes. We shall send rockets into space, perhaps using magnetofugal rings, or enormous wings, to be "blown" by solar radiation. We may have space stations ten miles in diameter, like enormous amoebas,

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each containing twenty to thirty thousand people—so many new Athenses. Then we shall move out beyond the solar system altogether, among the great stars, those immense reservoirs of energy.

As for the flesh, the eugenicists may realize the full potentialities of the species as it now exists, but we will alter its existence, perhaps by altering the germ plasm. Man will first live a "natural" life of perhaps a hundred and twenty years. Later, in a chrysalis stage, he will need improved organs—eyes that can see infrared and ultraviolet light, and so on. Finally will come a completely mechanized stage. Men will be short, fibrous cylinders in which the brain will float as in a jar of circulating fluid, with crustacean-type appendages for movement. Such brains can interconnect to form complex brains that will transcend individuality. Life will be lived in literal ecstasy. "The interior of the earth and the stars, the inmost cells of living things themselves, would be open to consciousness through these angels, and through these angels also the motions of stars and living things could be directed." In his Richmond Lecture, Leavis mentioned Lawrence's humility before nature (he quoted from *The Rainbow*) as emblematic of all that literature means. This makes more sense as a rebuke to Bernal than to Snow: "The new life would be more plastic, more directly controllable, and at the same time more variable and more permanent than that produced by the triumphant opportunities of nature. . . . Finally, consciousness itself may end or vanish in a humanity that has become completely etherealized, losing the close-knit organism, becoming masses of atoms in space communicating by radiation and ultimately perhaps resolving itself entirely into light."

As for the devil (our desires, *our* nature), Bernal held that psychology today is as primitive as physics was in Aristotle's time. We need planned and directed research; given that, we might build a new religion of psychology, and a generalized architecture, massive and molecular, and a generalized poetry to express the ever-widening complexities of our knowledge. (This generalization is the opposite of that particularity which modern literary theorists have claimed as poetry's special virtue.) But Bernal admits that the most recent books by D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley express a positive revulsion against such changes. Perhaps, he suggests, the human race will become dimorphic; one half will remain on the earth and devote itself to developing a fully balanced humanity; the other will take to space and will grope unsteadily beyond all that we have known in the way of values.

The phrasing is quite generous to those who will remain, but Bernal's creative sympathy is clearly with the innovators. In any case, it is evident how disturbing such ideas must be to life conservers like Leavis, and indeed to most men of letters, including Snow. Most humanists belong to that moiety of the race who care chiefly for developing a fully balanced humanity. Their most notable counterattack, written by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (1932), makes use of both Haldane's and Bernal's imaginings. Another attacker was C. S. Lewis in *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the third novel in his science-fiction trilogy, in which the villain appears to be a portrait of Wells-and-Gregory, and the ultimate horror—a head kept alive without a body—reminds one of Bernal's vision. Lewis's story is a fable of the dangers of scientistic arrogance and visionary idealism, and he speaks in behalf of poetry, and myth, and traditional Christianity.

During the Second World War, and especially at its end, with the invention of the atom bomb, English science was organized on a scale never seen before, and the fear of science in other sections of the culture increased in proportion. One notable expression of this fear was a series of BBC talks, "The Challenge of Our Times," on the theme, "The wide gulf between the scientific and the humanistic approach to life." The general adviser for the scientific side was Bernal. The number of listeners never fell below three million and sometimes rose to five million, and the producer received hundreds of letters asking that the talks be published.

The first speaker in the series was Arthur Koestler, who attacked scientism and planning and cited Bernal. Haldane, in his talk, accused Koestler of "negative morality," and said, "This is the first time in human history that men have had the knowledge, and with it the power, to tackle this job"—of creating the conditions of a good life for all the people of the world. "The methods of organized re-

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search, . . . perfected during the war, have put in our hands powers which are literally unlimited. . . . Those who foster the fear of using our powers are doing the gravest disservice to humanity." Blackett did not speak—he was only just emerging as the leader of the group—but the remarks of the other two make it clear why Snow says that the "modest difficult hopes for other human lives" are the gift of the scientific revolution.

On the humanist side, Canon Vigo Auguste Demant spoke of man's need for roots, and said that all sensitive men in 1946 felt a doom impending on their civilization, quite apart from the dangers of devastation by the atom bomb. E. M. Forster deplored the disappearance of the bit of countryside he had known as a child, and had written about in his novels as a symbol of history and nature. (It had been engulfed in a plan for a new satellite town.) "I am talking like an intellectual," he said. "But the intellectual to my mind is more in touch with humanity than is the confident scientist, who patronizes the past, oversimplifies the present, and envisages a future where his leadership will be accepted." (Such a Bernalesque future Forster obviously wanted no part of.) "Owing to the political needs of the moment," Forster continued, "the scientist occupies an abnormal position, which he tends to forget. He is subsidized by the terrified governments which need his aid, pampered and sheltered as long as he is obedient, and prosecuted under Official Secrets Acts when he has been naughty. All this separates him from ordinary men and women and makes him unfit to enter into their feelings. It is high time he came out of his ivory laboratory. We want him to plan for our bodies. We do not want him to plan for our minds, and we cannot accept, so far, his assurance that he will not do this."

Thus in people's minds in 1946—and ever since, at varying levels of explicitness—the threat of technocracy linked three issues: the dangers of the bomb, the dangers of scientistic planning, and the decay of old cultural and moral values. People committed to literature, like those committed to religion and to history and the other humanities, by and large all declared themselves against the bomb, the values of progress, and Russian-style social planning, however left-wing their politics. Leavis's sympathies must have lain with Forster. We know, from his essay "Wells, Hitler, and the World State" and his letters to Koestler, that George Orwell, so often parallel with Leavis in such judgments, agreed with Koestler about the dangers of communism-and-scientism. So did most literary men, including those who had been ardent left-wingers in the 1930s. But not Snow, although he was as disturbed about the bomb as anyone else, and as suspicious of Stalin, and as oriented toward the past rather than the future. Snow had associated himself with Haldane, Bernal, Blackett, and their hopes, even though his judgment dissented from theirs; he had recognized greatness in them, though of a kind alien to his own spirit; and in the final analysis he identified himself with them.

II. *The Political Connections*

The acquisition of political and social power by the Visible College gave the humanists extra reasons for alarm, and here we must turn to Gary Werskey, who has made the only scholarly study I know of this matter. Of Werskey's five subjects (Hogben, Needham, and Hyman Levy as well as Haldane and Bernal), only Haldane fought in the First World War, but Hogben said in an interview with Werskey: "All of us had our lives mucked up in one way or another by the war. We were therefore bound to be different from the older generation of gentleman scientists. Already in 1918 we knew that politics had a lot to do with science." In the 1920s they all spent time abroad doing research, and the experience had a further radicalizing effect—above all, for Hogben, the experience of living in South Africa.

By 1930 they were all established either in Cambridge or in London, at work in biochemistry, crystal physics, or genetics—all closely related to the great scientific quest of the times, the structure of DNA. In a letter to Werskey, Zuckerman said, "Biology in the late 20s and early 30s was a young man's game. . . . Wherever one mined, one came up with gold." Bernal says in his autobiography: "It was a happy and exciting time, because practically nothing was known then of crystal structure; it was all to do, and one could, in the laboratory, see the opening up of basic knowledge of the enormous field of the struc-

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ture of solid matter." This feeling of excitement reminds us of Rutherford, but these young men in some sense turned away from him, the great scientist of their fathers' generation. Bernal says that he decided Rutherford's particle physics would lead nowhere: "I found that my own particular interest, in form and geometry, was best expressed in the new atomic knowledge of the structure of matter." And that change of specific interest seems likely to derive from a more general and generational change—a search for a new scientific kingdom of their own. They turned away also from J. S. Haldane, father of JBS, who was a neovitalist in biology, and from Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans, who used astronomical physics and the theory of relativity in support of old-fashioned metaphysics. Hogben wrote attacks on all three, but in general the young men merely turned away in search of something new—ideologically something tougher and more contemporary, more radical.

A crucial event in their radicalization took place from June 29 to July 4, 1931, at the second International Congress on the History of Science and Technology in London. A group of Russian scholars attended, led by Boris Hessen and N. I. Bukharin, and their Marxist accounts of the history of science (all of them were published on the spot) made a great impression on the Visible College. Particularly Hessen's lecture, "The Social and Economic Roots of Newton's *Principia*," became a model for the Englishmen. J. G. Crowther's *British Scientists of the Nineteenth Century* (1935), and his subsequent histories, and Bernal's *The Social Function of Science* (1939), derived from Hessen's example. Bukharin and Hogben became personal friends, and visits were exchanged. Bernal went to Russia in 1931, Needham in 1935, Crowther often, and all were much struck by the higher prestige of science there, and the greater rewards for scientists. Bernal remarked that Dirac's *Quantum Mechanics* had taken three years to sell two thousand copies in England, but in Russia sold three thousand immediately. Haldane said that Karpov's reorganization of the Russian chemical industry was proving as vital to the revolution as Trotsky's political work. All disagreed with A. V. Hill's Huxley Lecture of 1933, which argued that scientists should stay out of politics.

The scientists of the Visible College were rebel personalities. Haldane never held a scientific degree, and in 1925 he was co-respondent in a divorce case that involved him in a further suit to keep his university post. By 1930, says C. D. Darlington, JBS was the idol and also the oracle of the protesting youth of that generation. In the early 1920s he belonged to the group of literary rebels. He was a friend of Aldous Huxley, and his *Daedalus* was first of all a lecture to the New College Essay Society at Oxford, where Maurice Bowra was a leading spirit. *Daedalus* shocked the senior Haldane, in the same way that Huxley's *Antic Hay* shocked *his* father; both were typical of the antipaternal books of that decade. Ivor Montagu says that JBS could be overheard socially saying things like "I have never gone in really seriously for bestial sodomy"—a very Huxleian gesture.

But JBS rebelled more sharply against his mother than against his father. His mother had been a keen imperialist and had taken the boy JBS with her when she went to speak for the Victoria League. As a boy he was very close to her and to her opinions, and when she sent him to Eton he was at first very unhappy. His sister, Naomi Mitchison, observed: "Perhaps this was the cause of his deep resentment against his mother and the established order." Certainly one of the major motives even of his last years seems to have been anti-imperialism—leaving England, and in India taking up vegetarianism, Indian clothes, and nonviolent methods in biology.

Comparing these scientists with the literary rebels of their generation, one sees that Eton and Oxford appear significantly less often in the record, and working-class origins significantly more often. At a deeper level, one notices an extraordinary personal bravery in all three of the principal figures. During the war, Bernal and Haldane particularly, and Blackett only slightly less, showed an unusual devotion to duty and a disregard for personal danger. In the First World War, Haldane, as bombing officer of the Black Watch Regiment, was described by General Haig as the bravest (and dirtiest) officer in the whole army. In his scientific work, Haldane experimented on himself quite regularly—for instance, to detect the effects of breathing carbon dioxide. "You cannot be a good physiologist," he said, "unless you regard your

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own body, and that of your colleagues, with the same sort of respect as you regard the starry sky, and yet as something to be used and, if need be, used up." This is in the spirit of Kipling. In 1940 Haldane worked on submarine disasters for the navy, and both he and his wife-to-be Helen Spurling subjected themselves to the gravest risks. This courage was a part of traditional English manliness, something the scientific rebels still believed in, instinctively, much more than did the men of letters.

There is a related phenomenon in their intellectual life, which we might call maturity. I have already pointed to Bernal's selfless devotion to dull intellectual tasks at the behest of his political conscience. But the same is true of the scientific work of all three. It *was* scientific—less showy and dandified than the equivalent literary work of their contemporaries in the arts. The scientists accepted the rules handed down to them with much less personal rebellion than the men of letters. Science is a much more institutionalized form of the intellectual life than are the arts or the humanities. The criteria of intellectual achievement are much more established, and much more in the keeping of institutions. To be made a Fellow of the Royal Society, to be given one of the great prizes, to have one's scientific papers cited is a measure of success, not to be referred to ironically. The concept of intellectual maturity is surely inseparable from an acceptance of such external and impersonal criteria. The scientific institutions "stand for" society, the race, reality; and scientists accept the authority of a joint enterprise.

One measure of that maturity, of the gulf that separated the scientists from the literary men, may be found in their relations with Guy Burgess, Donald MacLean, and Harold Philby, the diplomats who defected to Russia after betraying national secrets. There are many links, of temperamental sympathy as well as personal friendship, between these scientists and the men of letters of their generation, from W. H. Auden to Graham Greene. But you do not find the same links between them and the scientists, despite their common ideology. The scientists were not interested in self-destruction. What interested them was social reconstruction and social efficiency, rather than any other kind of politics.

What united and energized this group of scientists was the example offered by Communist Russia, an example of monumental planning, of industrialization from scratch, of scientism in education, of nationalized efficiency, of technocracy. Shaw, Wells, the Webbs all made trips to Russia in the 1920s, and the Webbs said that the USSR was a new civilization because of its unparalleled devotion to scientific method and discovery. The Communist party in Great Britain, as elsewhere, identified communism with the cause of science. John Strachey, in his Marxist phase, spoke of communism "saving" science, and the Visible College embraced the idea. Bernal said science was in danger in the capitalist West, for the first time since the Renaissance. All cited the prestige of science and scientists in Russian education and Russian society. Here was another idea by which Snow perpetuated their work. His essays often allude to Soviet scientism, and reinforce that impression by references that show his frequent visits to Russia. In *Science and Government*, for instance, he tells us that 35 to 45 percent of Russia's top people have had scientific training—25 percent of the Supreme Soviet as against 3 percent of the comparable echelon in America.

The Visible College had a strong sense that there was an English style in science, a very pragmatic, Baconian, technocratic style. In 1933, Blackett spoke of the practical temperament of British scientists, and the fact that in English laboratories the experimenter was required to do his own manual work. He spoke as one who approved, who shared this temperament. Bernal said in 1939 that the English regard science as a series of successful raids into the unknown. "It presents no coherent picture; theory is looked on suspiciously and speculation not encouraged." He described this style from a distance, obviously, but his own philosophy of science was, like Blackett's, English rather than, say, German. It was not ideal truth they were after but practical results, to be used for the good of society.

They were of course interested in practicing technocracy themselves, and one way for them to acquire and exercise such power was through the Communist party. But on the evidence available—although much still may be hidden—it seems likely that they

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were occupied with party politics at a fairly symbolic, or chiefly propagandist, level. Their real influence was exerted through groups like the Tots and Quots, a dining club founded around 1930 by Solly Zuckerman that during the war put significant pressures on the government: for instance, to have rational and quantitative analyses made of every problem coming up for decision. This turned into operational research, which was begun by Blackett at the radar research station at Bawdsey and extended by Bernal and Zuckerman. Blackett mathematically worked out the optimal size of naval convoys and the effects of various patterns of bombing. He compared this use of scientism in warfare to the use of mathematics in biology and economics, and after the war used the same techniques in attacking the arguments of the American (and British) governments for their atomic policies.

The war was their first great opportunity to put many of their ideas to work. Between 1939 and 1945, the conduct of science on a large scale effectively started. Government research expenditure was 10 million pounds in 1939; by 1956 it was 220 million pounds. Bernal became an expert on air-raid precautions, and later was scientific adviser to Lord Mountbatten at Combined Operations. He went to Quebec with Churchill in 1943 and worked on the plans for D Day. Blackett was already on the Air Ministry's Defense Committee when the war broke out, and in 1940 became scientific adviser to the head of Anti-Aircraft Command. In December 1941 he produced his paper "Scientists at the Operational Level," and in 1942 became director of Naval Operational Research. Zuckerman became adviser to Air Marshal Tedder.

Snow himself was called to the civil service in 1940; he was asked to find and train large numbers of scientists to work with radar—the work to which Blackett and Tizard had given top priority, against Lindemann's opposition, just before the war. Snow remained there until 1959, becoming, after the war, commissioner in a new scientific department of the civil service. (By 1947, 20 percent of Britain's scientists were in government service.)

The atom bomb itself was a check to scientism, although an ineffective one. Physicists often said that it had killed a beautiful subject, and in a Rutherford Memorial Lecture Blackett said that Rutherford's work had destroyed the possibility of pure science for his heirs. Bernal—"for once a little at a loss," Snow says—called it "that wretched discovery." Snow himself says that physicists became soldiers out of uniform because of the secrecy imposed on them, their duty to the war effort, and the influence of military associations—all of which sapped their moral nerve. As for Haldane, Joshua Lederberg has said about him: "It is perhaps more than a trivial coincidence that Haldane's most striking prophetic misjudgment had to do with the time it would take for the practical realization of atomic energy. This scientific catastrophe, more than any other, has exploded the peaceful dreams of social scientism."

But the reaction to the bomb was not all in one direction. For instance, the general excitement and attention it aroused had the effect of immensely increasing the scientific component in UNESCO, one of the phenomena of the postwar scene that carried the hopes of some members of the Visible College group. Julian Huxley became Director General of UNESCO; Needham went to work there; and Bernal was consulted about who else ought to have a UNESCO post. On the other hand, Clement Attlee's Labour government proved a disappointment to British scientists. J. G. Crowther has described the glee at his Society for Visiting Scientists as the 1945 election results came in, bringing Labour to power; and then the disappointment in the months that followed. Bernal, made scientific adviser to the Ministry of Works, put himself on his best behavior, trying hard to be respectable in expectation of important work. It did not come, although in France, it is said, he did influence the reorganization of science significantly. Blackett disgraced himself politically with his neutralist book, *The Military and Political Consequences of Atomic Energy* (1948), which argued that the bomb was only another weapon, like others, and that America's demand for strict international controls could not be justified. The book had international circulation and was quoted by Andrei Vyshinsky at the United Nations. Blackett was denied entry to the U.S. for several years, and when his plane touched down in America, on a flight from Mexico to Canada, he was arrested. Even in England he was, Snow says, exiled from

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power for sixteen years. Haldane grew embittered, and finally left the country.

In fact, Attlee gave power to no left-wing scientists, and tied England internationally to America, against Russia. The Visible College turned its sympathies toward the latter, and toward what was soon to be known as the Third World. In 1948 the Conference of Intellectuals for Peace at Wroclaw, Poland, was an occasion that marked their disaffection. Julian Huxley led a British delegation that included Bernal, Crowther, Kingsley Martin, Needham, and Levy. When the Russian delegates pressed for a joint declaration blaming world tensions on the West, Huxley refused his assent but got no support from his fellow delegates. Blackett was not there, nor had he attended other such conferences. He had gone to India, become friendly with Nehru, and begun to take a strong interest in Indian affairs.

The demoralizing and antiscientific effect of the bomb was to some extent counteracted by the excitement over the discovery of DNA. When, in 1953, J. D. Watson and F. H. Crick gave their interpretation of DNA structure in *Nature*, this was the culmination of forty years of work, which carried with it, by implication, enormous possibilities for man's control over his genetic heritage. All the main members of the Visible College had been involved to some degree, especially Bernal. In 1968, in a foreword to a reissue of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, he called it the greatest discovery in modern science, perhaps the greatest and most comprehensive in all science. It was a great triumph for Cambridge over Berkeley (where Linus Pauling had been near to beating them), and for England over America, since, of DNA's two discoverers, it was generally felt that Crick was the scientific aristocrat. The technocratic implications of that discovery are hinted at in Bernal's *Physical Basis of Life* (1964): "This brief survey of the field of life does show that we are now beginning to see the possibility of accounting for it in terms that fit in with our intellectual and manipulative control of the non-living part of our environment."

The manipulative control of our environment—that was the dream of these men that drew them constantly toward politics. In the 1950s, there was a dining group for scientists and statesmen that met at the Reform Club, and included Snow, Bernal, Blackett, Bronowski, Calder, Hugh Gaitskell, and R. H. S. Crossman. Crossman wrote in the *New Statesman* in 1958 about the new socialism of national efficiency, then being designed by Richard Titmuss and Thomas Balogh. Those were the days after Suez, when the old-gentlemanly establishment was in disgrace and technocratic efficiency was much in demand. In 1959 Gaitskell, then the leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, made an issue of the lack of national planning.

This was also the year of "The Two Cultures" and—by no mere coincidence—of the science policy debate that N. J. Vig describes as lasting from 1959 to 1964 and as producing the Ministry of Science (1961), the Trend committee on the civil organization of science (1962), the Department of Education and Science, the Council for Scientific Policy, and so on. In the 1960s came the scientists' big chance. Harold Wilson became leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1963, Prime Minister in 1964, and for the next twelve years remained the country's dominant political figure. He was a friend and admirer of Blackett, who sent him a paper, "The Case for a Ministry of Technology," in September 1964. In the same year, Wilson created that ministry, with Frank Cousins, the trade unionist, as minister and Snow, elevated to the peerage, as Parliamentary Under Secretary. Zuckerman became Chief Scientific Adviser to the cabinet.

Wilson also agreed, on Blackett's prompting, to take measures to revive England's computer industry, and generally made science, technology, and efficiency the slogans of his government's socialism. He pledged the country an economic renewal forged in "the white heat of the technological revolution." He made Blackett Deputy Chairman of the Advisory Council on Technology and wanted him to become a peer and a minister of state. Blackett refused those offices, but cherished large political aspirations of his own. He hoped to apply operational research methods to political problems, and to convert vast numbers of secondary school children from an interest in the humanities to an interest in the sciences.

What followed was of course a grave disappointment. Harold Wilson's government, as everyone now knows, did not succeed in mak-

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ing Britain efficient, and scientism was discredited by the experiment. A few weeks after Wilson resigned, in 1976, the Labour Party announced that the office of Scientific Adviser to the Government was abolished. Of the Visible College, those members who survived were already resigned to playing lesser roles. Snow told me that Blackett, in his last days, had agreed with him that they had misled Wilson's government into thinking that the introduction of new technology and new methods would make a bigger difference than in fact resulted.

In 1965 Blackett had made a speech on "Science, Technology, and Government," in which he said: "Certain it is that Britain's crisis is not essentially a failure of one or other political party, but a national failure in which we all, not excepting academicians and scientists, must share an important part of the blame. In a real sense it is a failure of leadership by the professional classes." He still thought then that his friends or he himself—so much a son of those classes—could lead them to a self-renewal by scientific methods. But the next ten years brought no such change. Snow now talks of the moral mood of the developed countries as a state of siege, people having given up and withdrawn from their commitments. He is speaking of other places besides England, but one senses that England is the prime source of his feeling.

Insofar as these men retained social faith, many invested it now in the Third World countries. This reinvestment had begun some time before—with Haldane's taking Indian citizenship, and Blackett's visits to India and the big part he played in the defense plans of the Nehru government. (It is worth noting that both Englishmen had had family members in the imperial government of India.) Haldane's sister, Naomi Mitchison, has taken a special interest in Botswana. Hogben was vice chancellor of the University of Guyana, and Needham has thoroughly identified himself with China. Snow has not turned away from English affairs, but he has spoken insistently for the claims of the poorer countries. This is a striking record of a post-imperial and anti-imperial white man's burden, for which it would be hard to find an equivalent in the literary culture. But still, in England the years of Wilson's government were years of defeat for the scientists.

One of the most vivid examples of this defeat was the decline in the numbers of students going into science, since the expansion of science teaching and learning was an implicit aim of the Visible College. J. G. Crowther had argued that England should build technological universities, and Blackett hoped to bring many students of the arts over into the sciences. But the reverse happened. In the early 1960s, England was training ten times the number of scientists as before the war (and losing a lot of them abroad). By 1970 this trend slowed down, almost stopped as far as England was concerned. University students no longer wanted to go into science. Nowadays science departments at British universities are filled with students from abroad, from Third World countries. In some schools of engineering, it is said, there are no native-born students at all. Moreover, the ideologically alert youths are antiscientific. They feel, it seems, that science has had its chance to solve England's problems and has failed. The teachings of the "Two Cultures" and the Visible College are, for the moment at least, repudiated.

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Books

Prehumous Classics

ELLEN MOERS

VICTORIAN NOVELISTS AND PUBLISHERS. *By J. A. Sutherland. University of Chicago Press. $13.95.*

To the Victorian novel addict, a few familiar facts about Victorian publishing come to mind each time he hefts the solid bulk of *Martin Chuzzlewit* or leisurely skims the varying chapter headings of *Vanity Fair*. But he may not stop to ponder the contradictory nature of these particular publishing facts: that the Victorian novelist wrote for normal publication in three volumes—and also for serial issue; that triple-deckers meant high prices only the rich could afford—and also that Victorian fiction was a product for truly popular consumption. Along with these paradoxes came a momentous shift in literary values, as, in defiance of tradition and prejudice, the novel became the leading literary form of the Victorian age and indeed of our own (which is, or should be, why we are so interested these days in the minutiae of Victorian publishing).

The prime publishing fact of the age, antecedent to all the rest, was the phenomenon of Charles Dickens—his genius, energy, and self-confidence. Not only did the Dickens novel sap life from the theater, sermons, poetry, journalism, and baser entertainments, but Dickens himself altered the terms and forms of trade between the novelist and his readers. From the start, he refused to be patronized, to be a hack, to follow anyone's orders (as was his publisher's intention) in the writing of *Pickwick*. All his life—through his publishing in shilling parts, his magazine editing, his entrepreneurial negotiations, and his readings—Dickens fought to put the author in direct contact with the public, and to put the public's money directly into the author's pocket, where it belongs. Dickens was only twenty-four when in 1836, on the eve of the young queen's coronation, he wrote "PICKWICK TRIUMPHANT" at the close of a fighting chapter of publishing as well as literary history. Even younger, as J. A. Sutherland reminds us, were the men about to rule the publishing side of Victorian fiction: Blackwood, Chapman, Hall, Macmillan, Smith—and Mudie.

In *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, J. A. Sutherland tells the important and, in his hands, dramatic story of the rise of the publisher to eminence and prosperity on the Victorian literary scene, as the sole significant middleman remaining between the novelist and his readers. About those readers we already know a good deal, through the studies by Amy Cruse, Q. D. Leavis, Kathleen Tillotson, Richard Altick, and others, but for the history of Victorian publishing the source has been mainly "Mumby" (as the standard work on British publishing is affectionately called); it gives only a dozen pages to the four decades between 1830 and 1870 to which Sutherland devotes two hundred.

Frank Mumby's *Publishing and Bookselling from the Earliest Times to 1870* is essentially impressionistic and anecdotal, with the human side of the Victorian book trade—the social introductions, the walnut-cracking book auctions—much in evidence. But Sutherland's study, in the current mode of scholarship, advances theories about the impact of publishing practice on literary production, supported by columns of figures he has amassed from the ledgers, contracts, and correspondence of the major publishing firms. It is an irony that his youngest students, to whom a decimal currency is the only reality,

ELLEN MOERS is the author of *The Dandy, Two Dreisers*, and *Literary Women*.

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will have their work cut out for them in the arcana of the old guineas, pounds, and shillings. (Dr. Sutherland teaches at University College, London.) And it is interesting that many of the publishing records he has examined are preserved today in American libraries located in Illinois, California, and New York—interesting because the most stimulating challenge to emerge from Sutherland's research is for future scholars to examine in detail those "immense differences" in the American and British book trade to which William Charvat, the principal American authority, referred a quarter of a century ago. Divergent pricing, printing, marketing, and author-paying practices perhaps accounted for more than we now imagine in the diverging novel traditions of nineteenth-century England and America.

Almost all of Sutherland's research is worth having; all of it makes lively reading. About half of his conclusions are valuable and original. His strongest points are those that bear on the general prosperity, aesthetic and financial, of English novel making in the early and high Victorian years. His weakest points are those that purport to illuminate the individual development of the greatest of Victorian novelists, an area where critical judgment of the novels themselves must guide and evaluate all research.

Most important are the data with which Sutherland effectively solves that vexing dilemma, how and why the implausibly high price for first edition fiction was preserved in Britain for half a century. A guinea and a half, the price of triple-deckers, was roughly what Charlotte Brontë earned in a month of governessing, before she wrote the fiction that she, and most of the middle class, could not afford to buy in volume form.

Sutherland demonstrates that to reach a working-class market was not at all the intention of the principal publishers, but that they brilliantly manipulated the class stratifications within the British middle and upper classes for all these were worth to the book trade. Through high prices, and the concomitant gilt-edged luxuriousness and solidity of the printed volumes, they won prestige for the novel as serious literature at a time when the form was constantly under attack on religious and intellectual grounds. Here the British publishers' parvenu craving for respectability, their prudent conservatism and evangelical convictions, stood them in good stead; and their commercial canniness led them to develop, to space out, and to prolong waves of alternate publishing forms. Novels in parts, magazine serials, shilling reissues, railway-stall editions, sixpenny volumes of collected works—these successively swept up from the middle class, over a long period, increasingly vast reaches of fiction buyers. The Germans published many more, and more serious titles each year, as Sutherland points out, and the Americans pioneered cheap initial prices and vast distribution for a few favored books (the best-seller syndrome); but the British publisher won a staying power for the novel form that belies the derisive ephemeral implication of its name.

Sutherland's conclusion is that the Victorians' intricate publishing mix of expensive quality with cheap reprinting had the effect of creating "a public capable of judgement based on sound critical reasoning"—that is, a truly literate public (*eheu fugax*) capable of relishing long hours of concentration over hundreds upon hundreds of pages of densely written fiction. This was the public that, for the first and last time since the Elizabethan age, made the best of English literature also the most popular.

Sutherland quotes Charles Lever on the implications of the cheap reprint for the publisher: "It has shown that the profits . . . cannot be reckoned on till after a considerable lapse of time. When an author's popularity has lasted long enough to be more than a passing taste and to stand the test of a new generation of readers—then, and only then can successive editions be regarded as profitable." There were implications for the novelist as well, and consequently for the modern critic of Victorian fiction. This century has returned to the Victorians, particularly Dickens, as creators of a total *œuvre* rather than of distinct, sporadic novels. We track themes and characters that persist from one novel to another; we note evolving patterns of social and psychological concerns and modulating colorations of novel tone: in Dickens's case, from the bright sunshine of *Pickwick* through the thickening grays and dense blacks of his later works. A grasp of the whole has proved

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highly profitable to criticism of any part of the novelist's production. Now Sutherland demonstrates that the critical procedure is soundly based on historical fact, for the same sense of the whole informed both the writing and the reading of novels in the Victorian age.

Dickens was always seeing through the press reprints of his collected earlier fiction as he wrote his latest novel. Constant reissue kept all his work—early, middle, and late—"continuously on display before the public" during his lifetime, and provided the novelist with what Sutherland calls "prehumous" classic status. "To become, in his new guise," Dickens wrote in the preface to his Cheap Edition, "a permanent inmate of many English homes, where, in his old shape, he was only known as a guest, or hardly known at all; . . . to see and feel this—not to die first, or grow old and passionless, must obviously be among the hopes of a living author." For the living author today, Saul Bellow might well reflect, the Nobel Prize is an honor easier to come by than a collected edition. And the consequence for current fiction may be self-imitation by the novelist, instead of development.

Bypassing the bookseller was another strategy of the Victorian publisher from which we have much to learn, and in this connection Sutherland provides interesting data about the rising expenditures on *pre*publication advertising. (The data explain why Mudie's Circulating Library, the principal consumer of three-volume fiction, continued for decades to receive ruinously large discounts from the publishers. Mudie's offered not only bulk purchase but the advertising benefits of a title's featured placement on its list.) Sutherland's evocation of the proliferation of book ads—on railway hoardings and omnibus placards, on thousands of handbills—adds a new visual dimension to our sense of the pervasive presence of the novel in Victorian society.

Chapman & Hall spent a thousand pounds advertising a Dickens novel *before* its publication in 1864, in order to ready the public, shilling in hand, to rush to buy 30,000 copies of the novel's first part (in pamphlet form) in two days. Part publication not only offered the novelist-in-progress the opportunity to respond to "feedback" from his readers, but also gave the public a chance to pass on a "pilot program" for a new novel by sampling its beginning and, sometimes, declining to buy the rest. In the case of this particular novel, which was *Our Mutual Friend*, Chapman & Hall had to cut their print order back 30 percent by the sixth number.

To mention *Our Mutual Friend* is to move to the limitations of Sutherland's study. He comments on the "wastage rate here": "Dickens usually had less of a fall-off than this. . . . What the dwindling represents, in part at least, is the publisher's efficiency in extracting revenue from the desultory reader prepared to speculate a shilling or two on a work he might or might not like." What the dwindling also represents is the *défi* Dickens threw at his public with the opening of part one of *Our Mutual Friend*: a scene, unrelieved by light or warmth, of corpse fishing in the murky Thames. To avoid reference to the bitter gloom in Dickens's last novel, as Sutherland does, is to omit a key fact of publishing as well as literary history; for *Our Mutual Friend* (usually considered a novel less to Victorian taste than to our own) nevertheless won for itself, and on its own brilliant merits, a vast Victorian public. If some of the initial ad-enticed buyers gave up, others must have taken their place in the rush for monthly parts, for *Our Mutual Friend* seems to have sold out very quickly a printing of over half a million parts.

Sutherland in fact rarely pauses, in his jaunty progress through the ledgers, to comment critically on the novels under discussion as so many gross of interchangeable parts and volumes. Perhaps he assumes a wide reading knowledge of major and minor Victorian fiction on the part of his readers. If so, the condition of academic literary studies must be different in his part of the world from ours. But he also feeds the currently fashionable assumption that it is no longer necessary to read individual literary works (especially long ones) because the statistical tools are at hand to "explain" the genre as a whole.

Seven chapters dealing with episodes in the publishing careers of Thackeray, Kingsley, Trollope, Lever, Ainsworth, Dickens, George Eliot, and Hardy make up the second half of Sutherland's book, and it is with these chapters that the specialist will most often have

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occasion to disagree—the old-fashioned type of specialist, who has actually read the novels. Here Sutherland puts forth a theory about decisive turning points in the contractual arrangements made with Ainsworth and Lever and even their betters. "Many would have backed Ainsworth's talent against Dickens's in 1840," Sutherland writes, lapsing as he often does into the language of the track; and "looking back over Lever's career one is forced to conclude that he did not have greatness in him. . . . He had been given his chance [by a publishing contract] and could make nothing of it." But the figures and the correspondence cited in this chapter simply illustrate the well-known fact that declining powers bring declining revenues and ruder treatment from the publishers. They hardly prove "The Shaping Power of Contract," Sutherland's bold subtitle to his chapter on Thackeray.

Ainsworth and Lever fit into Sutherland's vague category of the "second-rate," which seems to include everyone under "genius" level. What he asserts about Thackeray is more important, because of the novelist's quality and Sutherland's expert knowledge—his previous study was *Thackeray at Work*. He attempts to prove that Thackeray's luxurious 1851 contract with Smith, Elder, which freed him from the pressure of publication in parts, gave Thackeray license to conceive his next novel as "an artistic opportunity rather than a money-spinner." The theory is plausible, but its implications can be tested only by critical judgment of the novel that the contract spawned. It was *Henry Esmond* that turned out to be sorely lacking in the vitality of Thackeray's earlier and best novels, *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*, and they were both written in installments and under pressure.

Equally plausible and equally questionable are Sutherland's animadversions on the overlapping contracts that enmeshed Dickens in the 1830s, for Dickens's early novels reveal the firing up of his imagination under the pressure of deadlines, and by the need to juggle comedy and melodrama and different plots and characters simultaneously. The peculiar intensity of their relationship to their readers and their time may explain why both Thackeray and Dickens died in their fifties, but no tabulations and no theories can prove that part publication was either bad or good for the quality of Victorian fiction.

The question of quality also arises when Sutherland waxes enthusiastic over the alternately dictatorial and communal editing practices that Dickens instituted on *All the Year Round*, and claims that as a result the best fiction of the early 1860s appeared in that magazine. (*The Mill on the Floss*, *Framley Parsonage*, *Water Babies*, *Sandra Belloni*, *Wives and Daughters*, and *Alice in Wonderland* were, however, as he does not say, appearing elsewhere, and under less forcing conditions.) In the declining sales of *Felix Holt* Sutherland finds "the usual pattern with novelists who had enjoyed massive popularity for ten years," and offers the parallel case of Charles Reade, who "had been level-pegging with George Eliot at the beginning of the sixties." No "pattern," however, but simple good judgment led the public to prefer earlier and later George Eliot novels to *Felix Holt*.

The harder Sutherland tries to shape "patterns" into laws, to anchor literary value in commercial procedure, the more cautiously we must weigh his judgment and his evidence. "Some of fiction's triumphs were actually begotten by publishers rather than authors," he writes, citing *Pickwick* as "the most brilliant example"—*Pickwick*, which resulted from Dickens's triumphant defeat of a publishing gimmick! Even more objectionable is Sutherland's claim that "the whole career of Charlotte Brontë could be cited as the outcome of one publisher's discrimination and protectiveness."

George Smith, eight years younger than Charlotte Brontë, was just beginning his publishing career when she mailed him a novel in manuscript. By handling her with gentlemanly tact, Smith certainly established his own fortune as a publisher. For Charlotte Brontë, timid in commercial matters as she was fierce in artistic integrity, bestowed her permanent loyalty on the firm of Smith, Elder, which published all her novels and, directly or indirectly through her influence, also added Anne and Emily Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, and even Thackeray to Smith's list. He paid Charlotte Brontë lower royalties than her sales merited, and far less than any male novelist of her quality and popularity would have demanded.

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But all Victorian women writers were exploited by the publishers. Had Sutherland been alert to this particular aspect of Victorian publishing, he might have made a pretty chapter on the subject. As it is, throughout his study he provides fragmentary evidence of the position of women in the literary marketplace: that Mary Shelley was paid less than Bentley's other authors; that Geraldine Jewsbury earned much less as a publisher's reader than did George Meredith; that Dickens was rude and niggardly to Mrs. Gaskell when she showed independence as a contributor to *All the Year Round*. "Dickens was arbitrary about prices," Sutherland naïvely comments. "Lytton, whom he admired immensely, had £1,500 for an eight-month story; Mrs. Gaskell, whom he did not admire immensely, was offered £400 for the same length of narrative at exactly the same period." And he blithely concludes, toward the end of *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, that "one can view the sufferings of the Brontës with relative complacency. Posterity has atoned for these early humiliations."

Posterity in the mouth of a historian of publishing is somewhat like honor in the mouth of Daniel Webster. What Sutherland has most to offer us, and that is a good deal, is evidence that the Victorian publishers worked effectively to create the enthusiastic, intelligent reading public out of which posterity is made.

Junker and Jew

GOLD AND IRON: BISMARCK, BLEICHRÖDER, AND THE BUILDING OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE. *By Fritz Stern. Knopf. $17.95.*

Reviewed by J. P. STERN

On 3 July 1878, while attending the Congress of Berlin, Disraeli wrote to Queen Victoria:

> The great banker of Berlin is Mr. Bleichröder. He was originally Rothschild's agent, but the Prussian Wars offered him so great opportunities, that he now seems almost to rival his former master. He has built himself a real palace, and his magnificent banqueting hall permitted him to invite the whole of the Plenipotentiaries and the Secretaries of Embassy and the chief Ministers of the Empire. All these last were present, except Prince Bismarck, who never appears, except occasionally at a Royal Table. Mr. Bleichröder, however, is Prince Bismarck's intimate, attends him every morning, and according to his own account, is the only individual who dares to speak the truth to His Highness. The banqueting hall, very vast and very lofty, and indeed the whole mansion, is built of every species of rare marble, and, where it is not marble, it is gold. There was a gallery for the musicians, who played Wagner, and Wagner only. . . . After dinner we were promenaded through the splendid saloons—and picture galleries, and a ballroom fit for a fairy tale, and sitting alone on a sofa was a very mean-looking little woman, covered with pearls and diamonds, who was Madame Bleichröder and whom he had married very early in life, when he was penniless.

Gerson Bleichröder, 1822-1893, was the son of a small-time jobber and money changer who, from the early 1830s onward, acted for the Frankfurt and Paris Rothschilds as their Berlin commissioner. Gerson entered his father's business in 1839 and became its head in 1855, when "the House of Bleichröder," through a new form of economic organization, the joint-stock company, helped to finance the first boom of Germany's belated industrial revolution. In 1859, when Bismarck was leaving Frankfurt to become Prussian ambassador to St. Petersburg, he asked Baron Meyer Carl Rothschild for a reliable banker in Berlin; whether (as the story goes) he really stipulated that it had to be a Jewish banker seems doubtful—Bismarck would hardly have expected the Rothschilds to recommend anybody else.

Bleichröder served Bismarck as his banker, financial adviser, and general informant throughout the next thirty-three years. This unequal partnership forms the center and very nearly the meaning of Bleichröder's life. When, in March 1890, on a fourth request from the young Kaiser Wilhelm II, Bismarck resigned, one of Bleichröder's employees found his boss "very excited, sobbing, with anginal pains." "Bleichröder's tears," his biographer comments, "were genuine. . . . The tears were for himself."

J. P. STERN is a professor of German at University College, London, and author of *Hitler: The Führer and the People.*

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Between the Junker and the Jew close financial ties developed, to great mutual advantage. While Bleichröder's shrewd speculations in both the German and the international markets increased Bismarck's originally meager fortune manifold, he in turn derived considerable kudos and financial profit from being known as the chancellor's confidant and from being placed near the center of political news and gossip. "Knowledge of the Prince's character," writes Mr. Stern, "was perhaps the most coveted intelligence in Europe's chancelleries," for Bismarck's rule was the most personal and authoritarian in Europe. Through this connection (as well as through his continued service to the Rothschilds) Bleichröder came to be involved in a number of opulent international deals. His "House" was commissioned to collect part of the reparations after the defeat of Austria in 1866 and part of the harsh indemnities after the French defeat of 1871; he floated loans on behalf of Russia, Italy, Romania, and several South American states; he was involved, though somewhat reluctantly, in the financing of Germany's colonial program in South West Africa and in Leopold II's notorious enterprises in the Belgian Congo. Since this was an era when, in Prussia at all events, the notion of a conflict of interests was not strongly developed, Bismarck, with Bleichröder's assistance, was able to anticipate fiscal legislation in the Reichstag by changing the contents of his own portfolio, thus indulging his passion for landed property. And since this was an era of free international money markets, it was possible (though not exactly popular) for Bleichröder to invest on Bismarck's behalf in profitable French or Russian loans at a time of worsening Franco- or Russo-German relations. Of Bleichröder's single-mindedness and immense financial talent there can be no doubt. In 1872 he was ennobled for his services in connection with German investments in Romania, the first Jew to become *Herr Baron* without being converted. By the time Disraeli, deeply in debt most of his life, was writing to the queen, Bleichröder was the richest man in Berlin and, after the Krupps, in Germany.

All this, and a great deal more, is wholly new material which Fritz Stern, professor of history at Columbia University, was able to glean from various unexplored archives. He found more than a thousand letters of the Bleichröder-Bismarck correspondence on Bismarck's estate in Friedrichsruh near Hamburg, and in a rich cache at the French Rothschilds' country house of Ferrières (where, during the French advance of October 1870, Moltke had set up his headquarters). In New York Mr. Stern had at his disposal the archives of the Berlin bank's successors. An immense amount of material, all of it superbly documented and some of it tedious, has gone into what is not only the first, but surely also the definitive, biography of, quite simply, the richest Jewish banker of the Second Reich. One cannot help wondering what it was that determined Mr. Stern's choice of subject—whether it was something more than chance that put these abundant sources in his way. His previous work, and especially his remarkable book *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, is reflective and analytical rather than narrative. It is therefore not surprising that the "think pieces," and especially his deeply considered chapters on the role of the Jews in the Second Reich, are the most interesting as well as the most economically written parts of the present book. Too much of it, however, is taken up with finance high and low: a whole long chapter on skulduggery in Romanian railway shares, page after page on the ins and outs of the "Russian Conversion," on the nationalization of various German railway lines, on the finances of Bismarck's estates and the returns from his paper-mill. Like the recipes of great chefs, details of dividends and stock-market quotations are apt to leave most readers with a glazed look. But alas—and this is where the archival riches turn out to be a mixed blessing—such details make up the bulk of Mr. Stern's *trouvaille*.

There is thus a curious imbalance, a sort of fine flaw, about this ambitious book. One feels that what survives of Bleichröder in the business archives and in the memoirs of his contemporaries is not important enough to form the substance of a monograph of hardly less than three hundred thousand words; that the book's "proper concern"—Bleichröder's role and situation in Bismarck's Germany before and after 1870—is not rich and varied enough to yield the meaning and interest his

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painstaking biographer hopes to extract from his subject. To judge by the evidence presented: outside his financial wizardry Bleichröder did not possess a single original idea, did not utter a single memorable expression, was not capable of a single disinterested or courageous action. What intelligence he had was so entirely "functional" (to quote Mr. Stern's favorite term)—that is, so fully absorbed by his business deals—that none was left for a wider understanding of his own situation.

Bleichröder's immense donations to charity and medical research were, as Mr. Stern observes, a vocational necessity, a form of tax. When his long and anxious labors on behalf of Romanian Jewry came into conflict with his own and his clients' interests, he regretfully chose to use "the Jews to bail out the Junkers," without even fully understanding that his financial role was defeating his humanitarian purpose. Nor was he deterred from launching his great Russian loan by being urged to join a boycott against the wildly anti-Semitic Russian government; when told of Alexander II's "remarks about 'the damned Jews' [one of Bismarck's secretaries reports], Bleichröder was not angry . . . he smiled and whispered, 'frivolous man.'" Inevitably, his biographer's palette is restricted to lackluster hues that range from "fulsome" to "timid," from "subservient" to "deferential," from "solicitous" to "obsequious." However hard Mr. Stern tries to inject some nobility or dignity, some pathos or genuine hubris into his subject, Bleichröder emerges as a dispiritingly dull fellow: hard-working and calculating but not patently ruthless, disloyal rather than treacherous, apt to importune with presents rather than engage in gross bribery, mostly law-abiding, fearful rather than vengeful, a fond and sentimental paterfamilias, and forever ready to smother those who berate him in honeyed words—in short, the respectable anti-Semite's quintessential Jew. (The prospect of the book's appearance in Federal Germany fills this reviewer with gloom.)

Aware of the imbalance at the core of his book, Mr. Stern is apt to exaggerate Bleichröder's influence on Bismarck and his importance in the context of Bismarck's Germany. (This must be why so many paragraphs open with vapid sentences like "Bleichröder visited Bismarck regularly," "Bleichröder continued to be privy to Bismarck's thoughts," "Bismarck often voiced concern about Bleichröder's health. . . .") The banal truth is that Bismarck was unique—Mr. Stern justly calls him the supreme politician of modern Europe—whereas Bleichröder was exchangeable, in his personal identity no less than as a financier. And the less banal truth, which Mr. Stern's presentation is apt to obscure, is that, beyond the range of the primitive IOU relationship, money gave Bleichröder no real political power. He sought, and found, an exalted yet precarious social position and an uneasy relationship with the great. His money gave him the chance to influence a number of fiscal measures, a candidate's decision to withdraw from the hustings, a newspaper's editorial policy. The loans he launched did indeed influence the history of several European states, but here, as in other spheres, he remained overshadowed by the Rothschilds and was no more than the equal of several other bankers, Jewish and Gentile. Mr. Stern complains that Bleichröder has been neglected by historians as an "unperson," that he "is everything that has been left out of German history." A fine disjunction creeps in between Mr. Stern's descriptions and his evaluations. It suggests that although the historian's verdict has indeed been unjust, no great consequences can be expected from its reversal. When Mr. Stern ends his book by saying that Bleichröder "was both master and slave of his society," the sentence is more sonorous than true. One is at a loss to think of a single occasion when Bleichröder was capable of playing—or perhaps even willing to play—the role of the master.

Yet this is, and will assuredly remain, an important book, for Mr. Stern has a great many profound things to say that are unaffected by the imbalance I have mentioned: on Bismarck's political genius and the motivation of his supreme skill as a tactician; on the uneasy position of the German bourgeoisie in a state informed by the improbable compound of feudalism, militarism, and industrial expansion; on anti-Semitism as an integral part of the history of the Second Reich; and on the conservative wing of German Jewry, their hopes of total assimilation,

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and their anxious conformism. (In this context, too little room is left for the role of anticonservative, liberal Jews—one thinks, for instance, of the author's own namesake, the Soest journalist Josef Stern.) Above all, he throws a powerful light on one of the most deadly paradoxes of recent European history: "The fact that . . . the German *Bürgertum* never acquired the self-confidence and historic importance of the French and British bourgeoisie," Mr. Stern writes at the end of his finest chapter, "meant that the Jewish community did not have a liberal shield that would defend their rights as part of a code of universally recognized human rights"—yet these were the very circumstances in which Jews were assimilated into German society, and assimilated more quickly and more fully than anywhere else in Europe. They *were* Germans, in all respects and situations save those involving political power. This paradox made them unique, and rendered them defenseless in their hour of need.

Nothing Like a Dame

REBECCA WEST: A CELEBRATION. *Critical Introduction by Samuel Hynes. Viking. $20.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM HALEY

The problem in writing about Rebecca West is the number of people, from George Bernard Shaw onward, who during the past sixty years have done so already. Being herself an unambiguous and deeply perceptive writer, she has drawn the same qualities out of her critics. So many of them have been forced to say much the same things that her literary fame is to some extent a necklace of clichés. In the end such a string of tributes could hang her fame. The new generation of readers, accepting potted opinions, may think they know enough about her writings, and have no need to read them. The best celebration of Rebecca West—and she richly deserves it—would be a collected edition of her works. Since our transatlantic wonder has re-

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cently been aroused by the news that an American publisher has undertaken the reprinting of 121 Victorian religious novels, it is not beyond reason to hope for a venture much less extensive and far more worthwhile.

Meantime this volume does good service. That it presented problems is clear. While Rebecca West can write with a style that moves her readers and with a vigor that drives her lessons home, she is neither a Walter Pater to be culled for purple passages, nor a George Bernard Shaw machine-gunning the reader with outrageous sentences. Her buildup is always careful. She has sought to architect her critical essays as well as her reporting and her novels. John Ruskin, it is true, said in *Mornings in Florence* that "it is the crowning virtue of all great art that however little is left by the injuries of time, that little will be lovely." This is not always true of the surgery of editors, no matter how skillfully they have coped with necessity.

Nonetheless they deserve tribute. While at first glance *Rebecca West: A Celebration* seems akin to *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, it is a much more substantial volume. Much of the literary criticism is complete. So are some of the tales. Although the section from *The New Meaning of Treason* has had to suffer cuts, the theme and the argument are unimpaired. The reporting has been skillfully handled. On the other hand, even though, as the publishers tell us, the nineteen pages from *The Birds Fall Down* were Dame Rebecca's own choice, they can give little idea of the quality of that remarkable novel. Doubly welcome are the extracts from *This Real Night*. They present a situation vividly and convey intense feeling. Better still, a footnote makes plain that they come from an as yet unfinished sequel to *The Fountain Overflows*. That lifts the heart. When *The Fountain Overflows* was first published twenty years ago, it was announced as the first installment of a novel on the grand scale. As such it promised to be Dame Rebecca's finest fiction. Years went by; no sequel came. I lamented this in *The Times* (London) and heard from her that the project had been abandoned. Dare one hope that the words "as yet" indicate that she has changed her mind? Clare Aubrey, her daughters, Richard Quin, and Mr. Morpurgo are all immediately familiar after this long interval of time, and spring to life again. Clearly they have refused to let their creator abandon them, just as Christina Light would not let Henry James rest until he had told more of her. However much more of *This Real Night* has been written, I would have liked it in this volume. But enough of caviling. There must be a wholehearted welcome for the long succession of extracts from Rebecca West's greatest work, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. They have been given more than 200 of the *Celebration*'s 780 pages. And rightly.

So much for the book; what about the writer? Rebecca West's span of time is great. She was eighty-five this past December. In the essay she wrote when Kipling died she recalled her "enchanting memories" of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897, "such feasts for the eye as I do not think I knew again until the Russian Ballet came to dip the textiles of Western Europe in bright dyes." (Her two studies of Kipling in this book are among the fairest and most penetrating that have been written about this complex and most indeterminate genius. "Some of his work," she says, "was gold, and the rest was faery gold.")

She first appeared in print in 1911. She was eighteen. It was the year of Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad's theme has been one of her main preoccupations in recent years. Shaw had not yet written *Heartbreak House*, *Back to Methuselah*, or *Saint Joan*. That year D. H. Lawrence made a start with *The White Peacock*. It was the year of Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*. Sixty-six years later Rebecca West has outlived them all, and is still writing.

The publishers stress that her range as an author is also great: "Fiction–Biography–Reportage–Essays–History–Travel" the dust cover proclaims. If the impression received is that Dame Rebecca is a women's lib incarnation of the nineteenth–twentieth century Man of Letters (Saintsbury called them Maids of All Work), whose rise and fall John Gross has chronicled, it is false. She is no snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. A sense of purpose is clear in all she writes. Neither her first novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (which is an unconscious variation of the theme of Walter de la Mare's *The Return*), nor her

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biography, *St. Augustine*, was written for want of a better subject. In all she writes there is an underlying sense of compulsion. Professor Hynes, in his introduction, which is reprinted from *The Times Literary Supplement*, recalls that in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* Rebecca West described how she had sought to dissuade a Viennese university student from writing a thesis on her works. She had, she said, never written in order to reveal her personality, but "to discover for my edification what I knew about various subjects which I found to be important to me." That is true as far as it goes. But the subjects she has found important to her have helped to establish her character. Among them are "the strange necessity" that makes art matter, false romanticism (Dame Rebecca found my preference for Conrad's *The Arrow of Gold* over some of his other works incomprehensible), integrity, loyalty, and its extreme opposite, treason. I know of no one who has written about treachery with more consistent depth and wisdom.

The traitor can change the community into a desert haunted by fear, and it is our business to realise what force is at work and change it back again. Loyalty has always had its undramatic but effective answer to treason, insisting on its preference for truth instead of deceit, and good faith instead of bad. But on occasion the answer has to be framed more cleverly than at other times, and ours is a period when it becomes no answer at all, but a pact with treachery, if it be not dictated by caution and fastidiousness. We must keep our clear sight: we must not, for example, blind ourselves to the knowledge that the Rosenbergs faced death with magnificent courage. We must reject evil and dispel suspicion without falling into the error of confusing unpopular forms of virtue with evil. We must remember that quite noble attempts to defeat evil may, in sufficiently perverse circumstances, be mistaken for evil; and unfounded suspicions may be engendered. Since the traitor's offence is that he conspires against the liberty of his fellow countrymen to choose their way of life, we ally ourselves with him if we try to circumvent him by imposing restrictions on the liberty of the individual which interfere with the legitimate business of his soul.

That comes from *The New Meaning of Treason*, which includes Rebecca West's reporting of the trial of William Joyce (Lord Haw-

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Haw). In spite of the fact that Dame Rebecca once said that reporting had ruined her career, I think that of all her roles it is as a reporter that she is incomparable. Her reporting of the Nuremberg trials for *The New Yorker* is famous. Much of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is historical reporting. Her approach to her subject is always deliberate. She describes the countryside around Nuremberg as well as the scene inside the courthouse. She can show crucial witnesses in a murder trial in their homely settings. And always it is done with understanding and—even for the guilty on occasions—with compassion.

Rebecca West's literary criticism has been placed alongside Virginia Woolf's. It has not been so extensive. She has belonged to no group or coterie. She has found beauty in Joyce's *Ulysses*, has declared that D. H. Lawrence has a claim to our reverence and gratitude, has seen Conrad as, in a sense, nearer to Shakespeare than any other modern novelist, and has interpreted Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle* as religious allegories. She can be severe:

> Charles Dickens wrote because he was a snob, who, when he was the world's darling, could blush if he was reminded that a kind old gentleman had given him a half-crown tip twenty years before. He found he could escape from the loathed circumstances of his being by exercising his faculty of impersonation; by pouring his vitality into the creation of character after character, with which for the time being he could identify himself. That was the secret of his virtue as an artist; just as the secret of his vice was his determination to use every device of overloading his books with diffuse, incomprehensible, mutually destructive plots so that his imagined world never would crystallize into coherence, lest it should reveal itself as governed by the same laws as the real coherent world, and he should be born again into obscurity and contempt.

I have little space left for *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. More is not needed. The longer one spent in describing the cosmos, the more impalpable it would become. It is enough to say that this massive historical, political, philosophical, poetic description of a journey through Yugoslavia before the beginning of the Second World War—hundreds of miles in distance and two thousand years in time—is one of the masterpieces of the century. More than anything else that Rebecca West has written, it declares that no matter what the world's circumstances or hers might have been, *she* would never have thrown herself into a millrace.

Scholarship as Footwork

SIR AUREL STEIN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORER. *By Jeannette Mirsky. University of Chicago Press. $17.50.*

Reviewed by PAUL FUSSELL

During the past two centuries exploration has diminished to travel; and during the past fifty years travel has attenuated to tourism. One significant difference between these things, as Morse Peckham has noted, is the kind and amount of learning thought appropriate for each. The explorer must be thoroughly learned, a master of ancient and modern languages as well as of historical topography understood from original sources. The traveler must at least be literary, knowing history from guidebooks and previous travelers' styles of perception from travel books. Finally the tourist, if the industry devoted to him is to function, must know nothing. "Explorers are to the ordinary traveler what the Saint is to the average church congregation"—thus Hugh and Pauline Massingham in *The Englishman Abroad*. If any explorer ever deserved canonization as a hero of learning he is Sir Aurel Stein, the dapper, courageous little magister of Central Asian archaeology.

The writer of a full and richly detailed account of Stein's life and work must be almost his equal in Central Asian learning, and Jeannette Mirsky, who worked almost twelve years on this book, is eminently qualified to interpret Stein's achievement. Her feel for landscape and topography matches Stein's own, and her learning in wide historical and geographical contexts enables her to write

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here what is virtually a history of Central Asian archaeology, with Stein at the center. A historian with a highly developed sympathetic imagination, she is never doctrinaire. Throughout the book she settles the facts and puts them down evenhandedly and affectionately, aware that human history is very long, and motives complex and always to be respected. Her book is an admirable record of the work of the indefatigable intellect, both her subject's and her own.

Born in Budapest in 1862 and named Marc Aurel after Marcus Aurelius, Stein was baptized a Protestant because his parents wanted him to succeed in one of the learned professions, then largely closed to Jews. As a child he spoke Magyar and German, to which he added French, English, and finally Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, and Persian. He was the lucky recipient of a German education at Dresden, Vienna, Leipzig, and Tübingen (Ph.D., 1883) in the days before current events was considered a university subject. His subjects were comparative philology and Sanskrit, ancient history and historical geography, and he developed early a devotion to three heroic travelers: Alexander the Great, Marco Polo, and Hsüan-tsang, the Chinese pilgrim of the seventh century whose accuracy in describing the overland route from China to India prompted Stein to call him "the Buddhist Pausanias." He capped his education by more linguistic, archaeological, and numismatic studies in London and Cambridge. His luck held even during his year's compulsory military service back in Hungary. He might have wasted the year sweating on the parade ground and listening to bawdy stories. Instead he was sent to map-making school, where he mastered surveying and the niceties of topographical representation.

He knew he had to get to India to investigate on the ground the ancient cultural, commercial, and religious intercourse between China and India. He got a job as an educational administrator at Lahore, a convenient venue for his real work: the discovery and interpretation of Sanskrit manuscripts and the exploration of Buddhist architecture. He was tough and stubborn. When Freya Stark met him in Baghdad thirty-five years later, she noted his "gentle deceptive manner," the

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"manner of those who always get their own way." He finally got his own way in India. In 1900 he set off on a fully mounted fourteen-month expedition, supported by the Indian government, to Khotan in eastern Turkestan, where his studies had told him there were Buddhist landmarks in the desert waiting to be excavated. Assisted variously by ponies, yaks, and camels, Stein and his party cheerfully braved glaciers and avalanches and subzero temperatures (Stein's ink froze constantly, impeding his evening note-taking in his tent). They climbed twenty-thousand-foot mountains without oxygen and arrived finally at the torrid desert. There Stein located and excavated numerous Buddhist shrines buried under the sand, just where he knew they would be.

Returning from these happy exertions in 1901, he was appointed an education inspector in the Punjab and three years later became a British subject. In his letters, as Jeannette Mirsky says, "educational work is always accompanied by the adjective 'tiring,' whereas his strenuous assault on mountains is 'invigorating,' 'refreshing.'" His most famous Central Asian expedition was his second, from 1906 to 1908. After discovering numerous first-century documents at the site of a wall marking the western frontier of ancient China, in a cave at Ch'ien-fo-tung he came upon a hidden library of ancient Buddhist documents guarded by a Taoist priest whose determination never to part with these sacred materials matched Stein's determination to secure them for Western scholarship. After weeks of cajolery, bribery, and pressure, Stein purchased and came away with some three thousand text rolls, together with innumerable silk paintings, banners, and embroideries. It was a triumph less perhaps of "archaeology" than of patient, single-minded diplomacy. Stein's thinking, Jeannette Mirsky notes, "was colored by his unshakeable belief in the primacy of Western scholarship. It justified everything"—even depriving a monk of his sacred treasure and spiriting it off to the British Museum.

Carrying this hoard back to India, Stein suffered the only severe physical misadventure of his career. On a twenty-thousand-foot glacier in a temperature of sixteen degrees (F.) below zero, his toes, frostbitten, turned gangrenous. After a month's painful journey to a hospital, he lost to the surgeon two toes on his right foot and the tips of the others. But he was now a hero, promoted from the education department to the Indian Archaeological Survey, and his name was coupled with Nansen's, Peary's, and Shackleton's. Back in England to deposit and catalog his finds at the British Museum, he was elevated to the status of Commander of the Indian Empire and soon became a knight of that order—hence the "Sir."

A third Central Asian expedition followed in 1913. As usual, Stein exhibited his quiet powers of command by keeping in order forty people and twenty-six camels while he aimed for the Afghan-Russian border and eastern Persia, hot on the trail of Buddhist survivals. During the day he traveled with his caravan or supervised excavation; at night he took notes, wrote his books, and read proofs by lantern light. The fruits of this assiduity were the seven major books he published from 1907 (*Ancient Khotan*) to 1940 (*On Old Routes of Western Iran*). The loss of his toes slowed him down not at all; in his mid-sixties he would walk hundreds of miles to inspect a wild mountain pass where Alexander was reputed to have conducted a defense. Only once was he really frustrated as an explorer. This was in 1930, when his carefully planned expedition, financed by Harvard, to survey Inner Mongolia and pick up artifacts for the Fogg Museum, turned into a fiasco. Politically conservative and persuaded of the superiority of Western learning, Stein failed to notice that the rise of xenophobia in the new China might make his pokings around there look like a threat, at least to the new Chinese self-respect. He brushed aside warnings that he might be heading for trouble. As Mrs. Mirsky says, "His dogged persistence, honed sharp by his long apprenticeship in learning not to take No for an answer, had hardened into willfulness." The Chinese finally tired of hearing him insist on his prerogatives and expelled him.

Today the sort of scholarly questions Stein sought to answer look refreshingly liberal. A typical one: Where exactly did Alexander cross the Hydaspes? An expedition to Iran in 1932 gave the answer. Another: Where were the Roman roads and military outposts in

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Syria and Iraq? Airplane flights over the desert (courtesy of the RAF) helped Stein make out the traces. The spry old man lived until 1943, and his refusal ever to fold his tent or his hands made him an exemplary senior citizen. On one of his late expeditions to a remote part of what is now Pakistan, he came across a number of ancient sites, but wrote—he was then eighty—that he was "reserving trial excavations for later" because he had to dash off "to the southwest mainly with a view to tracing the exact route followed by Alexander on his march into Gedrosia." After years of solicitation, he finally secured permission to explore in Afghanistan, and his heart leaped up. But "dyspepsia" and old age intervened, and he died suddenly at Kabul on his way in.

Stein was notably a man of his historical moment. For one thing, he belonged to the tradition of high-minded strenuousness associated with Theodore Roosevelt and Robert Baden-Powell. For another, his almost mystical fondness for mountains and high altitudes was an index of his Germanic brand of late Romanticism. Although he deplored Hitler, he would have adored a mountain retreat like the Berghof near Berchtesgaden, situated so like the tents Stein loved to pitch on mountaintops. There, "in absolute Purdah" and dressed in jacket and tie, he would write his books in total silence, his dog Dash curled at his feet.

Monster in Our Midst

THE PLUG-IN DRUG. Television, Children, and the Family. *By Marie Winn. Viking. $8.95.*

Reviewed by JAY AMBERG

What moral monster among us stands accused of the following: corrupting our young, destroying family life, subverting literacy, inciting violence in our streets, and ruining our

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JAY AMBERG is a high school teacher in Highland Park, Illinois, and is writing a book on the effects of television on students' writing.

The Saint

By Conrad Ferdinand Meyer
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Translated from the German by W. F. Twaddell

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political system? The monster is that small appliance, the television set, placed in the corner of one's den, or living room, or bedroom, there to do its daily evil. A forthcoming book by Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, is advertised by its publisher as being "the first book ever to advocate that television is a technology so inherently dangerous—personally, ecologically, and in terms of the concentration of power it encourages—that it should be considered taboo and done away with forever." Apocalyptical though it is, this is nonetheless characteristic. With the possible exception of crop failure, at one time or another television has been blamed for everything that has gone wrong in the modern world. If anything, of late the accusations have become more strident. A new dimension has recently been added by Marie Winn, who goes a step beyond maintaining that television brings about drug addiction to say that television itself is a drug—according to the title of her book, it is *The Plug-In Drug*.

Miss Winn has a notion—that in television the medium is the message and the message is a narcotic-like addiction—that other writers, most famous among them Marshall McLuhan, have toyed with before. But hers is a book distinguished by the bluntness of its point of view. She is altogether in earnest about her drug metaphor: two of her book's chapter subheadings are "Cookies or Heroin?" and "An Insidious Narcotic?" Yet at times one wonders, to switch metaphors for a moment, whether she isn't chasing ghosts that have appeared on her screen.

For all the clarity of her point of view, Miss Winn is not very clear about the nature of the medium that is her subject. She sees television as essentially visual and nonverbal, ignoring the oral element that is an integral part of the medium. Her analogy for watching television is that of a person "staring into a flickering fireplace." Not only does this ignore sound, it assumes that the images television throws up are random, shapeless forms—which they are not. Moreover, she asserts that the pace of television, the speed with which information is presented, is much too fast for viewers, regardless of content. While she is right that one of the fundamental differences between reading and watching television is a person's ability to control the flow of information in the former, the fact remains that the pace of the flow varies greatly depending upon content. One need watch only a few commercials to understand this: in the time it takes the monomaniacal Mr. Whipple to squeeze the Charmin, members of the Pepsi Generation have played volleyball, picnicked, and guzzled barrels of the soft drink.

Because Miss Winn ignores the effect of content—what is actually being shown on the television screen—she leaves herself open to making some patently absurd statements. She assumes, for instance, that because of the nature of the medium, viewers are not mentally engaged while watching television. A viewer's "passive participation," she writes, "leaves him unchanged in a human sense." (Could he be changed in another sense?) While it is generally true that viewers remain unchanged, this is not solely, or even chiefly, because of the nature of television but because so much of its content is drivel. Yet Miss Winn would be hard pressed to show that no one who watched "The Pallisers" or, on a lower artistic level, "Roots" was unchanged.

Apart from her notion that the medium is the message, Miss Winn's book shares the intellectual slovenliness common to much writing about television. Writers on this subject too often lack a sound scientific approach in their presentation of evidence. An aspect of this in *The Plug-In Drug* is Miss Winn's careless borrowing of evidence to clinch her argument. In her discussion of television and the writing of schoolchildren, for example, she concludes that television has prevented children from acquiring reading abilities and, consequently, the ability to write. Dubious enough in itself, this conclusion is based on the following statement: "According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the writing of American students has been steadily deteriorating." Miss Winn has taken this from *Newsweek*, apparently without bothering to read the report from which *Newsweek* first took it. The report itself suggests nothing so dire as she describes; not only is the deterioration far less steady and grave than she would have us believe, but, according to the report, the writing of nine-year-old students (nine-, thirteen-, and seventeen-year-old students served as the three

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groups used for the study) did not decline at all. Inconveniently for Miss Winn's argument, the conclusion that nine-year-old students—who watch even more television than older students—wrote as well as their predecessors topples her theory that watching television is at the root of the problem.

To her credit, Miss Winn does offer testimony about the effects of television from many people who actually watch it. Talking to people who watch television, rather than to those who study it, or produce it, or declaim against it, is the obvious but by no means common approach in books about television. But there is something a bit skewed about the statements of people quoted in *The Plug-In Drug*. They tend to fall into two categories: those whose lives have been made miserable by television, and those whose lives are idyllic precisely because they do not watch television at all.

Ah, if the world were only so simple. One begins, while reading *The Plug-In Drug*, to wonder about one's own friends, who, although they watch some television, seem relatively happy, and whose happiness or unhappiness stems from their jobs, friends, and families—not from television. One begins to wonder, too, if Miss Winn has not dug up a handful of people whose biases match her own and who, taken together, result in an anthology that might be entitled *Grown-Ups Say the Darndest Things*. We read, for instance, the words of a teacher who, while talking about her experiences watching television as a child, reports: "It was like no orgasm, no catharsis, very frustrating." Again, another woman comments about her young son's preference for watching television over bike riding in the afternoon: "Well, I fought that tooth and nail! I'd explode and have a tantrum and say, 'We're not going to watch *any* television if it has that sort of hold on you!' I'd make a scene about it and declare that we were going to have some new rules about television! But those never lasted very long." Is it parental discipline and not television that is the problem here?

So much writing about television revels in jargon, and *The Plug-In Drug* is no exception. Persons in their twenties or younger don't merely like to listen to music; rather they have "an extraordinary dependence on

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musical experiences." Mothers who turn on television for their children suffer from "The Half-Busy Syndrome." And here is Miss Winn on the relationship between television and the use of drugs: "For it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that a time-consuming involvement, almost an indoctrination, into a particular style of consciousness different from the normal one would leave a generation predisposed to other experiences that restore them to similar mental conditions." Behind the thickets of such prose Miss Winn is saying that merely watching television leads to using drugs. Here the utility of jargon becomes plain: it is useful to disguise what in straight language would be instantly revealed as commonplace or nonsense.

Yet another problem, glaringly reflected in *The Plug-In Drug*, is the self-righteous contempt for ordinary people on the part of those who write about television. Although, in Miss Winn's phrase, those of us who watch television are involved in "self-annihilation," her "television generation"—those adults born since the end of World War II—fare far the worst in her pages. This is "a generation [that] seems to have emerged for whom ordinary speech is not as crucial a form of communication as it has been for past generations." And more: "Today a circle of young people holding hands, communing with each other wordlessly, is far more characteristic than the intense coffeehouse conversations that typified the generation of the fifties." Gone, too, are the "Victorian children who pursue hobbies and wholesome adventures," replaced by children who are unwilling to face "real-life" because they are in "darkened rooms" watching television. Name any generation one likes and Miss Winn will can it in a cliché.

Television has scarcely been a boon to American or any other culture, but is it really the monster it has been made out to be? Or is it, like the Dr. Pepper of television commercials, so misunderstood? As a first step toward understanding it we might do well to attempt to discover why it has become so convenient to have it stand in as the cause for half of our vices and three-quarters of our social problems. In the attempt, we might just learn a good deal about television, and even more about ourselves.

Shrinking Literary Values

PSYCHIATRY AND THE HUMANITIES, Volume I. *Edited by Joseph Smith. Yale University Press. $12.50.*

Reviewed by JONATHAN BRENT

The debate of the 1950s and 1960s about the scientific status of psychoanalysis is over. The criticisms that Ernest Nagel presented at the 1958 New York symposium of philosophers and psychoanalysts have not, perhaps, been successfully met, but they have been successfully forgotten. The debate now tacitly in progress—and ultimately, I think, of more lasting significance to the discipline—is over the humanistic value of psychoanalysis. Does the body of psychoanalytic theory provide a humanistically central approach to the problem of being human, to the problem of human "being"? *Psychiatry and the Humanities* indirectly addresses itself to this continuing, if undeclared, debate. The market has been fairly glutted with books purporting to give psychoanalytic interpretations of history, religion, literature, political personalities, and events. One wonders, though, how much of this is simply the result of a long-accumulated inertia and how much represents a vital condition of thought. Has psychoanalysis come so readily to hand, have its presuppositions become so merely habitual for us that such interpretations of literature, religion, and politics, rather than opening up new territories of knowledge, serve merely to confirm quietly established expectations, and follow but the least venturesome and safest pathways of thought?

Psychiatry and the Humanities is marred by the absence of a perspective on itself. The problem of the relation of psychiatry to the humanities is never approached, except indirectly in the first two essays, by Paul Ricoeur and Erich Heller. The role of psychiatry in the humanities, its place in the spectrum of humanistic investigation, its possible effects on the currents of contemporary thought are subjects either not brought up or simply taken for granted. Beneath the great agitation of interdisciplinary rhetoric there

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exists, it would appear, a widespread complacency, an easy acceptance of inherited assumptions and values that must be enervating to any scientific or humanistic enterprise. Freud initiated psychoanalysis with a work that was both an analysis of the self and a self-analysis. His moral and intellectual strength was as great as his theoretical insight. It is just this interior, almost moral, strength that psychoanalysis, I believe, stands in danger of forfeiting as it draws larger sums of theoretical credit against the collateral of Freud's genius.

Not that psychoanalytic terminology, theory, and direction have not changed since Freud. Obviously they have—greatly. But this change is due to the constant revision of concepts, the continual revaluation of data that must accompany any vigorous scientific discipline. Psychoanalysis, however, is not like other such disciplines; it has received as much insight from art, literature, religion, and philosophy as it has repaid to them. Its relation to the humanities is unique, and demands the attention that *Psychiatry and the Humanities* promises but does not, at least in the first volume, deliver.

This anthology is a miscellaneous collection of random essays. Its best parts appear, as in a carton of strawberries, foremost, while those less favored are circumspectly kept from immediate view. The articles by Theodore Lidz and Maurice Friedman require comment, if only because they lie thus at the bottom of the table of contents. Lidz tells us in "The Family, Myth, and Ethics":

> During these times that try men's souls—when our democracy is threatened . . . I, like many others, have been preoccupied with the perversion of ethical principles . . . as well as with the weakened national ethos, which leaves us without collective purpose and direction.

Lidz then attempts to meet the ethical challenge presented by this situation by cursorily examining one or two myths, detailing briefly the role of the family in personality development, and drawing one or two rather commonplace conclusions about the nature of moral behavior. His language has a touch of the cliché in it, and so has his thought. What is morally desirable, no matter how many platitudes are piled on top of it, can never be

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offers "true, restoring, delighting 'satisfaction.' Having read it I feel I have been waiting for it—and I have." **—Archibald MacLeish**

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reduced to what is psychologically or socially desired. *Ought* and *is* are not as neatly reconcilable as Lidz supposes. What our "times" need is, if anything, a colder consciousness of the radical distinction between fact and value, rather than another means of facilely evading it. We do not become good because we become healthy. Cleanliness is but next to godliness.

Friedman's essay, "Healing Through Meeting," forces us to examine the same unexamined thinking process. Friedman begins with the straightforward task of presenting the principles of Martin Buber's concept of healing through meeting. He then attempts to elucidate the family therapy of Farber and Nagy in the light of these principles. The essay, however, quickly deteriorates into a mass of ungovernable clichés. In the end, we protest not against the thought of the essay, but against Friedman's way of thinking itself. For one thing, he takes no note of his own ambiguities: "The parent, the teacher, the nurse, the shaman, the medicine man—anyone who lays hands on another or helps another—is involved in healing through meeting." Are we all, really, in such a vast ward for the disabled that we must find each instance of mere courtesy or friendship, each accidental acquaintance or word, "healing"? Furthermore, what does Friedman mean by "helps"? Help across the street? Help one off with one's coat? Help plot a murder? We never know.

A singularly fresh, though technical and difficult, paper on language is contributed by Joseph Smith. He summarizes the psychoanalytic model of language and relates this model to Piaget and Chomsky. His conclusions, I think, have significant implications for more than the psychoanalytic study of language.

> The ego differentiates from external reality and from the id by means of preverbal thought and action. A wish names an object, an external reality, and also a need, an internal reality. At the same time, even at a primary-process level, it names a relationship between need and object. The action pattern which fulfills the need confirms the differentiation of need, action, and object, and a first orientation is established. I would suggest that the sequence of this adaptive system has the structure of a sentence. . . . The need is the "I" or noun phrase, and the action and object the verb phrase anlage.

If the formation of the self unfolds the structure of language, we can see why psychoanalysis should pay such close attention to literature. Though presented in highly specialized terminology, Smith's article confirms the essential psychoanalytic interest in what Louis Dupré speaks of as the need for transcendence. Dupré concludes his essay on the mystical experience of the self with the following observation:

> The self is *essentially* more than a mere self . . . transcendence belongs to its nature . . . and a . . . failure on the mind's part to realize this transcendence reduces the self to *less* than itself.

Alone among the various sciences of behavior, psychoanalysis recognizes this truth. Indeed, in this recognition consists the particularly "humanistic" value of Freud's theories. At the crossroads of science, religion, philosophy, and art, psychoanalysis not only continues to verify the reality of this transcendence, but in so doing continues to make it possible.

In "Observations on Psychoanalysis and Modern Literature," Erich Heller points out how sensitively Freud's theories responded to this crossroads in the world of their birth.

> Psychoanalysis appears to be more than merely one among many possible theories about the psyche; rather, it comes close to being the systematic consciousness that a certain epoch has of the nature and character of its soul.

Heller's essay, besides being the best written, is also the most provocative, and raises the most interesting questions concerning both the history and the future of psychoanalysis, not only in the humanities, but in our total world view. Heller makes due allowance for the scientific character of Freud's thought, but he insists that its compelling power consists not in its empirical evidence but in its expression of the consciousness of the Romantic period. He notes that Mann's *Magic Mountain*, a work so resonant with psychoanalytic implications, was written before Mann had even read Freud. Romantic and Freudian thought meet, Heller believes, in

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the concern "with the innermost character of a person, with his *being*." Other psychologies examine "conditioned responses," "roles," "behaviors," not an innermost character, a "being." In exploring Freud's appropriation of this being by means of Romantic literature, Heller in effect points out that some theory of transcendence was, from its very conception, inherent in Freud's thought. Do we, in this post-Romantic, post-Modern period, still care to possess the kind of essential selfhood that Freud not only investigated but conferred? Such an innermost character is under assault not only from the Skinnerians, but from artists and philosophers themselves.

Heller himself raises the point that Kafka was deeply ambivalent toward psychology.

> But if the unimaginable day ever comes when men, beyond sickness and illusion, live in the integrity of being, then the spirits of Freud and Nietzsche may give their assent to Kafka's resolve, unrealizable in his time: "Never again psychology!"

Kafka's dictum may be closer to fulfillment than Heller supposes. The unimaginable day may come when we will simply live without the assent of Freud and Nietzsche. One possible indication of this is given by Heller himself. Although he proposes to discuss the relation of psychoanalysis to modern literature, not one of the artists or philosophers he mentions is still alive. Mann, Kafka, Goethe, Nietzsche can all be viewed as modern only in a generous historical sweep. If we have gotten beyond the Romantic period and its conception of the self, will Freudian theory remain imaginatively compelling? This sticking place in Heller's essay clearly gives the first volume of *Psychiatry and the Humanities*, and its successors, a distinctly modern occasion.

Heller demonstrates that art, especially literature, was as necessary to the birth of psychoanalysis as were the patients whom Freud examined. Freud's understanding of art and his insight into neurotic behavior complemented each other, formed each other. If such a view seems to place too great a burden of cultural responsibility upon the shoulders of today's psychoanalysts, it is but the responsibility they tacitly assume when they undertake to examine another person's being, not

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as a set of "behaviors" or "conditioned responses," but as a continual and creative effort at self-transcendence. Psychoanalytic excursions into works of art, however, are usually so inept, aesthetically, that one hopes for better treatment for the patients. So often analysts use art or the personality of the artist as merely additional sources of information in order to confirm conclusions to which they have already come.

Artistic truth is not psychoanalytic truth. The difference derives essentially from what Justus Buchler in *The Main of Light* describes as two different forms of judgment. Paul Ricoeur's essay, "Psychoanalysis and the Work of Art," provides the single most intelligent approach to the subject of psychoanalysis and art that I have ever read. Ricoeur not only recognizes Buchler's fundamental distinction; he quite self-consciously elaborates a theory upon it. The first distinction that Ricoeur draws is between "the essence of the artistic function," which psychoanalysis cannot probe, and "the manifestations and limits" of art, which psychoanalysis can. By limiting the range of psychoanalytic inquiry, Ricoeur actually enhances it. Psychoanalysis can study the concrete work of art, not the artist's intentions. How refreshing is this view! Critics such as Harold Bloom, who extort confessions of buried sadomasochistic tendencies from their defenseless subjects, should take note. Ricoeur's more important distinction, however, is between genetic and structural models, between psychological content and aesthetic form. Ricoeur stresses that the work of art is not reduced through psychoanalysis, but becomes open to it. The relation of literature to psychoanalysis is not merely interpretive; it is profoundly circular:

> It is . . . the psychology of children that furnishes the core of the argument [for the Oedipus complex] provided that it has "universal validity." But it is the legend and its literary elaboration which provide the evidence for this. The explanation is thus perfectly circular: psychoanalysis brings out "the particular nature of the material"—which a bit further on is called "the primaeval dream-material;" but it is the tragedy which makes it speak.

Ricoeur's point is that this conclusion is provided by Freud himself in the *The Interpretation of Dreams* and elsewhere. Sophocles' tragedy does not merely support the Oedipal theory; it completes the theory by giving Freud aesthetic universality and coherence.

Ricoeur's method of inquiry, his process of thought itself make his article valuable and worthy of the attention of humanists as well as psychoanalysts. Freudian theory is as misapplied by literary critics as works of art are violated by psychoanalysts. The failure on both sides to articulate the limits and integrity of their disciplines, the form of truth at which they hope to arrive, and the presuppositions that orient them have made most sensitive readers, lay and professional alike, weary of the subject and those who engage it. Work such as Ricoeur's is the only assurance that the humanistic value of psychoanalytic thought retains not only vitality but heat.

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